

THE
BECKONING
HEIGHTS

PHOEBE
FABIAN
LECKEY



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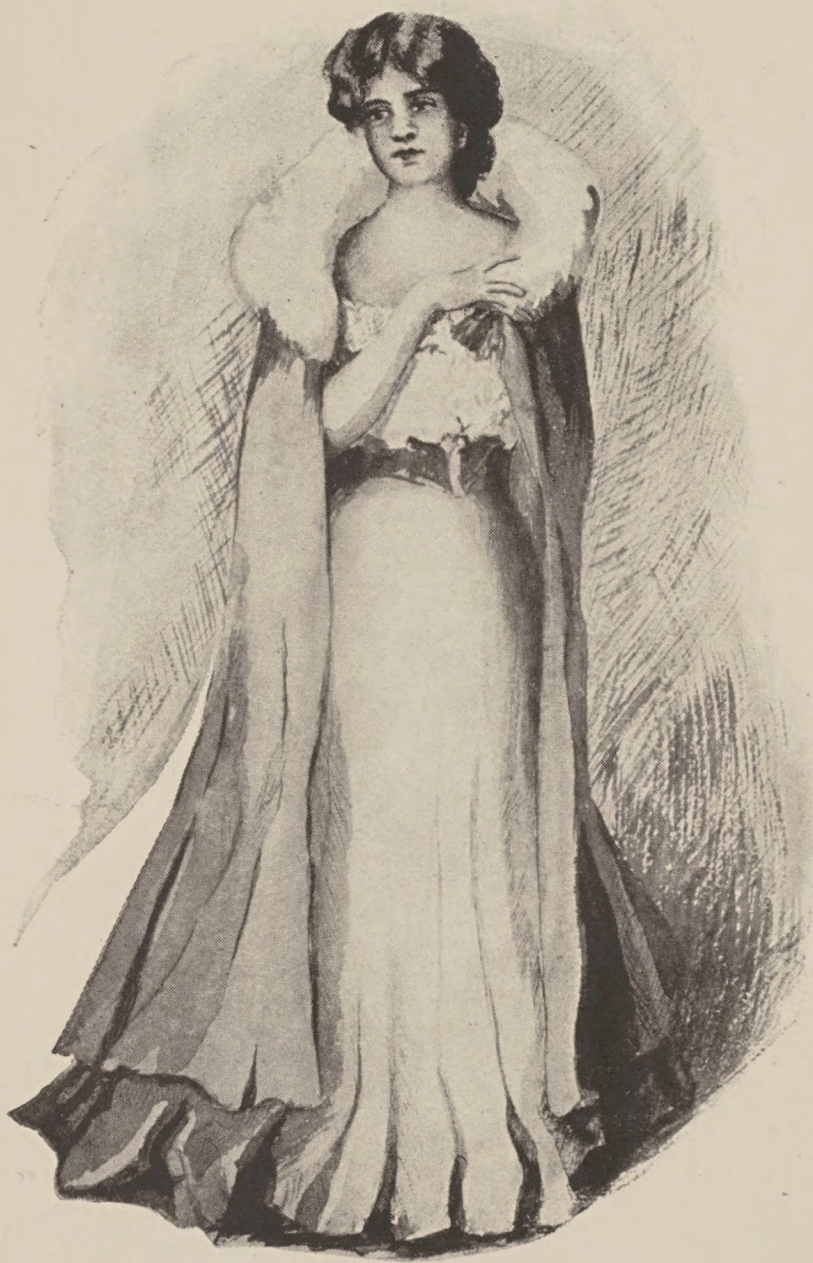
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THE BECKONING HEIGHTS





“ ‘I am “F. F. V.” to the marrow.’ ”

FRONTISPIECE

THE BECKONING HEIGHTS

BY
PHOEBE FABIAN LECKEY

*"I will lift up mine eyes unto the Hills,
from whence cometh my help."*

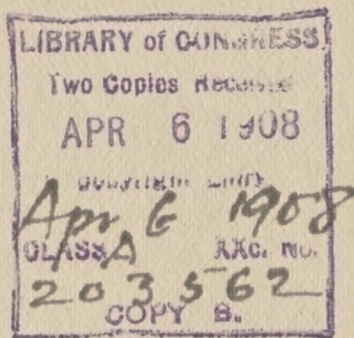
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TO MY MOTHER
GRANDDAUGHTER OF THE
HOUSE OF GRIGSBY
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY
DEDICATED

The author desires to acknowledge the courtesy of her Aunt, Mrs. William Elliott Baker, of Roswell, Ga. for a photograph of the latter's home, "Barrington Hall," of which the "Nunnery" is a reproduction. This old homestead, one of the most beautiful and well preserved colonial residences in Georgia, stands within a stone's throw of the "Bullock Mansion," famed as the birth-place and girlhood home of the President's mother, at whose wedding the mistress of "Barrington Hall" assisted as bridesmaid.

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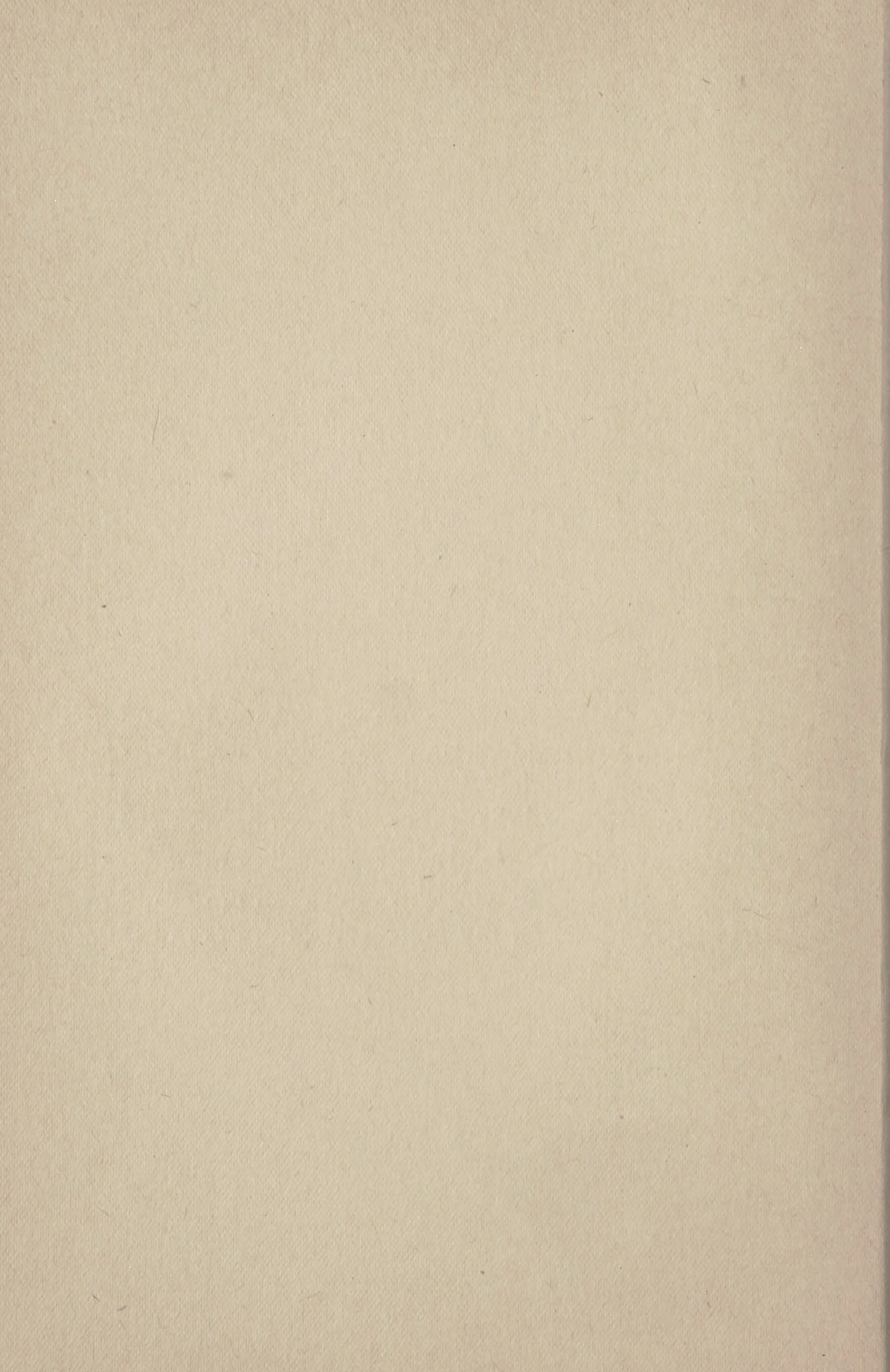
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THE BECKONING HEIGHTS

PRELUDE

"What 's your name, boy?"

The outline of faded shirt and jeans trousers was slightly shifted. That fat-bodied cherry-tree had, doubtless, the best of intentions, but proof was now at hand that cherry-trees have their limitations.

"No use to hide," resumed the tormentor. "I saw you jump behind there—I see you now."

Very reluctantly, the boy emerged from his traitor refuge and stood abashed, his eyes to earth, his hands buried in the blue depths of jeans trouser pockets, his tongue paralyzed.

"Can 't you talk, boy? I say, what 's—your—name!"

"Dunno."

The girl tossed a shock of brown curls and tilted a small brown nose.

"That 's a funny name."

"They call me, 'Gogaphy'," he ventured, burrowing his battered toe into the red-clay bank with great display of energy.

"Is that your sprinkled name?"

"What 's that?"

His eyes sought hers boldly enough now, in pros-

pect of information. He was a wayside weed doubtless, but weeds, even like fragile flowers, thirst and wither for water; and the dews of knowledge fell seldom on this small plant of a much neglected rural vicinity.

In this his first glance, however, he saw nothing so formidable—no flashing eyes, just an array of dangling curls. But the manner of their dangling, and the set of the straight back, told plainly enough that some mistake had been made, and “Gogaphy,” without knowing why, began to feel guilty.

“I just knew it!” she soliloquized at length.

“What ’s ‘it’?” asked the boy, marshaling his fleeing wits.

“‘It ’s’ what I know *you* never will be, that ’s certain,” she replied with energy, at the same time making much ado to leave him, though she put no great distance between them.

Taking advantage of the prolonged back presentation, Gogaphy mounted nimbly to the top of the worm fence by the roadside, and labored to screen his ungainly feet behind the friendly rails. He had passed in a moment of time through one of those ethical changes, mysterious, not to be defined, yet incalculably significant in its results for time and eternity. For the first time he knew that he had feet—objects to be viewed apart from the conglomerate whole of a boy’s person, and of discernible significance. He knew, also,—and the

sudden realization well-nigh staggered him,—that they were out of all proportion, big, bungling, and hideous.

Of another and painful fact he likewise became conscious. He was a social being, and as such, was expected to talk. But how? Of what? His feet grew; the silence grew—it was audible.

“Huh?” he ventured in desperation, uncertain if an interrogation were in order.

Realizing now for the first time that a change of venue had taken place, she turned, and coming nearer, looked him over in silence.

“Huh?” he repeated.

“Do you mean ‘what’?”

“I mean, what ‘s a ‘sprinkled name’?”

“No use to ‘splain it; you can ‘t comperhend.”

“I wonder why, now, jest!” He sat up straight and squared his shoulders to repel the blow.

“Aunt Judy says all the folks in this part of Virginia that aren’t Presbertyrans are same as alley cats in the city, an—”

“What ‘s that got to do with me?”

“You aren’t Presbertyran, that ‘s what!”

“Maybe I am—you don’t know.”

“ ‘Deed I do, then! Presbertyrans here are the quality folks, with fine clothes an’ airs an’ manners, an’—, anyway, you aren’t one, ‘cause you don’t even know what ‘sprinklin’ ‘ is, and you ‘re *more* like an alley cat!—O Lawsy Me!” Having delivered herself of this Aunt-Judy-flavored decision,

the child executed a whirligig gyration, and laughing a merry, birdlike laugh, sank down on the bank by the roadside.

The boy watched her dreamily. She seemed to him some gaily flitting butterfly, or some fairy-winged princess, not to be approached, and quite reverently to be regarded, else she vanish, as did all the pure creatures of his dreams—vanish, and that forever, from the unlovely pathway of his life.

"Why am I same as an alley cat, I wonder?" he soliloquized.

"'Cause that 's the way alley cats do when I come near them—scamper up fences."

He came down slowly from his high perch. It seemed the only thing to do, and with Gogaphy the thing to be done was soon under way.

"If you 'd jest tell me what 'sprinklin' ' is," he said in the tone of one who had put to flight an army of Goliaths, "guess I can do that, too."

"You don't *do* that, that 's done *to* you."

"What with?"

"Water, silly."

"Gee! I bin done, millions o' times!"

He took out a much abused barlow, and again began excavations, this time under his battered finger-nails.

"Look here, Gogaphy, and quit paring your nails. It 's this way: your parents carry you to church an' take you up in their arms, an' the

preacher gets a pan of water an' pours it on your head, an' names you, an' you 're sprinkled,—see?"

He closed the precious barlow and stuffed it and his hands down into the blue depths of oblivion. He had hoped she would see the knife and admire it; but this demonstration of results gained by a good half-hour at the grindstone that morning had been misapplied. And here he learned another lesson: in the artistic trimming of nails lay a deeper significance than the mere exhibition of superior blade qualities. Heretofore there had been no thought of results. But now—? He slipped a hand to the surface and saw at a glance that his nails were not nails to be proud of—certainly nothing like the pink-curved shells that tipped the dainty fingers of his companion.

"Well," he sighed after a pause, "guess I 'll never be one of 'em, 'cause I aint got no fine clothes an' airs an' things, an' I aint got no parents to git me sprinkled; but I aint worryin'—Presbertyrans aint everything if they *do* think so! Jest wait a couple o' years 'till I 'm a man!"

"What then?" she queried, getting to her feet and edging up closer to him in her eagerness.

"Then I 'll be mayer of Mooretown."

"Oh, but you can 't."

"Why, I wonder?"

"Aunt Judy says the mayers an' preserdents an'

'fessers an' things are all Presbertyrans in this part of Virginia."

"Who 's Aunt Judy?"

"She 's my black mammy."

"Aint you got a white one?"

"No."

There was a long pause which the boy broke.

"I aint got none—black, white, or no kind."

"Well, a papa 's just as good,—Haven't you got a papa?"

The boy shook his head.

"Poor Gogaphy!—I 'm sorry." Two big tears rolled over her cheeks, themselves wondrous big and round. Of the joys of a mothered life she knew nothing—but life without a father!

"That 's why I aint got no nice clothes an' can 't talk an' pare my nails an'—"

"You 're nice, anyway," she hastened to assure him. "You don't pull my hair and call me 'Fatty', and 'sides,—I 'm sorry—"

In this moment of time the white hand of pity had stretched forth, and, touching some secret spring in that barrier between them, had revealed a door through which she passed to his side, and saw him, one of her kind, with like capacity for infinite joy, but living the infinitely sorrowful life of the unloved—a life that might have been hers—might still be, were her father to leave her.

They made a picture—those two—a study in flesh and blood for the philosopher of social ethics;

while over them and about them the ineffable charm of a June day—a June day in the Valley of Virginia—strove to blind the sense to the underlying element of tragedy.

She was perhaps nine, short, plump of limb, and brown as a berry; he, several years older, slender, with a forehead high and white, and great gray eyes, radiating a thoughtful intelligence. Her frock of finest muslin contrasted oddly with the clothes of the boy. His trousers reached halfway between knee and ankle after the hopelessly plebeian style of the rural urchin; while both shirt and trousers, having long since yielded up their pristine beauty to the persuasiveness of home-made soft-soap, exclaimed their tragedy by sundry bright patches conspicuous at points of vantage. Her legs were encased in stockings of white silk; on her feet were the daintiest of slippers. She was a thing of light and sparkle; he, the heavy chrysalis, whose uncouth mould and manner gave little promise of the shining power that slumbered within.

The day was drawing to a close. The cherry-tree cast long shadows down the road which sloped gradually to where, a few hundred yards below, a phalanx of forest trees reared a verdant barrier. Here it turned to the right and wound in and out among many-hued houses far down the river valley.

At the top of the hill which way the girl had

come and on the left as one descended to the river, a gate opened in the worm fence, and a drive led off from the village highway to where the white pillars of a mansion gleamed against a background of tree-trunks and dense-matted foliage. Beyond that gate at the hilltop, and unconcerned that it here parted ways from the steppings of grandeur, the village road labored on, descending the hill, climbing many more, weaving a tortuous way along a rocky creekside, folding about the feet of green, sheep-sprinkled hillocks, racing away through undulating meadow-lands to the north and west. And everywhere, along creekside and roadside, hiding as culprits behind hills or fearlessly riding their summits,—some large, red-brick or stone, and sadly bewailing their fading glory, others new and sordid in their gay, cheap paint,—stood the homes of the people—the people of Mooretown.

From one of the humblest of these, where he gained a hard bed and board as general utility boy, Gogaphy had stolen that day with his fishing tackle and the undying hope that cheers the heart of the fisherman. The tackle—a stick of hickory to which was tied a string bearing a bottle cork, bullet sinker, and crooked-pin hook—had served no mean end; for, trudging up the road from the river, he had swung with much pride his string of finny thophies. And thus it was that, in contemplation of his fish, he had allowed the small stranger,

strolling alone down the road from the park gate, to come upon him too suddenly to permit of an honorable retreat.

He had heard the rumor of late that the old house, unoccupied for years and unguarded save by a pair of middle-aged servants, had wakened from its sleep and thrown open its doors to greet the home-coming steps of the master who had held its hospitality so lightly. He had heard, too, that a fairy form was now to be seen flitting in and out among the trees and shrubbery of the park and terrace. She was, no doubt, the fairy of his recent day-dreams, and that she had come to haunt her hidden hollows was no great wonder, for the park, with its acres of wildwood seclusion, had always seemed to Gogaphy an enchanted spot, a fairy realm come down to mortals. Often, during his stolen rambles about those quiet retreats, he had thought to see some airy form take shape before him, and beckoning, vanish up some ravine-bed. But now as he crept past the gate, guilty with a sense of his longing to see her, he scarcely dared lift his eyes above the dusty road-level.

But now—oh, wonder! She stood there beside him. Already he seemed to know her well—to have known her long—and, for a fairy, she was not so fearsome. She had already laughed at him, raged, and shed delicious tears of sympathy—and she showed no eagerness to leave him!

Just then, over in the west, an array of purple-

gray clouds parted, and through the opening poured out a flood of splendor. Then a breeze, fresh from a romp among the white pines on the mountain-top, tumbled by, freighted with life for all things living. It nodded the plumes of the wild carrot that fringed the roadside; it parted the cherry boughs and discovered My Lady Robin, sitting secure on her nest in a prong, about her a wilderness of green with much luscious manna for the gathering; it converted the topmost bough into a swing in which His Lordship had much ado to retain his dignity; it tossed the curls of the little girl, kissed the olive cheek to a dull blush, and, getting into the big eyes, fanned them into a fire of glittering iridescence. A quail called somewhere up the fence row: "Bob White—poor Bob White!" A straggling line of ill-favored village cows dragged their lazy limbs up the road toward the children. The girl went up to stand close beside the boy. He straightened up and forgot his pockets and his big feet. She had paid him a tribute that is not lost on the youngest of his sex—a tribute to his strength, a mute appeal for protection. But the cows, not even glancing their way, snailed past and on up the hill toward the sunset.

The bob-white's whistle ceased, but a whip-poor-will took up a weird refrain down by the river.

The boy took his first step closer to his companion. She did not move but regarded him silently.

"Say," he ventured.

"Say what you want, Gogaphy," she encouraged.

"I aint got no parents to carry me to church an' I don't know no preacher, an'—"

"Tell you what," the girl interrupted, "I want a playmate dreadful, and Aunt Judy won't let me play with you 'less you 're a Presbertyran, sure certain; let 's run down to the river 'fore she finds me, and I 'll sprinkle you myself."

"I ain't quite such a nonny as that, I hope!" replied the boy with some show of displeasure.

"Yes, I can!—'sides,"—she leaned close to him in the gravity of the issue at hand, "—'sides, I want to see the river, and they wont let me."

That settled it.

"What 'll we get for the pan?—Oh, here's just the thing!"

She darted to the foot of the cherry-tree, and grabbed the bait can, in the bottom of which writhed certain whole or fragmentary survivors of an awful fate.

"Ugh, the horrid things!" The can rolled unhindered down the bank, trailing a procession of wrigglers in its wake.

"Fraid o' worms!" The contempt in his tone was withering. Then selecting from the mass a specimen whose size was veritably snakelike, he held it up to her terrified gaze.

"Here, hold yer hand."

She quickly suppressed a desire to flee, using instead a woman's subterfuge.

"If you want to learn manners, you mustn't throw snakes on ladies, Gogaphy."

He dropped the worm and stuffed the hand in his pocket.

"And you mustn't cram your hands in your pockets, neither."

"Why don't you ask my name?" she panted, as they raced down the road to the river.

"I dassent."

"I 've got eight: 'Martha, Mart, Mottie, Mat, Mattie, Pattie, Pat, Patsy'—any 'll do; I get 'em all."

"And that isn't all," she continued, as the boy was unable to answer; "our F. F. V. is 'Grigsby'."

"What's an 'F. F. V.'?" he asked quickly.

Patsy sighed.

"I 'm 'fraid you 'll never be one, Gogaphy,—a First Family."

"Reckon I wont when I aint got no family—first or last."

"Wonder if it 's any use to sprinkle you then? Seems like Aunt Judy says the Presbertyrans are all First Families—I 'll ask her."

"Jest sprinkle me, anyway. It might help."

"Gogaphy's a funny name," she began after a pause.

"'Taint my name."

"You said so."

"I didn't."

"You—! 'scuse me, Gogaphy," corrected the little aristocrat.

"But I did."

The child beamed on him.

"You 're improving right along, Gogaphy. That 's manners."

"Manners!"

"Certainly: manners is when you'd rather con-terdick yourself than dispute a lady's word. I know what you said; you said: "They call me Gogaphy!"

Revolving this problem in his head he forgot the question before him, and they walked on in silence.

They had now reached the river, flowing dark and sullen beneath its dense-arching canopy. At this point not a ripple moved its surface; but farther down to the right, where the stone buttresses and rotting timbers of an old dam opposed its way, it seemed for an instant to draw its breath, to gather its latent strength, then to swoop with hoarse and deafening roar onto the patient rocks beneath. Its distant, sullen boom, that woke to defiant answer some spirit dweller of the mountain peaks beyond, hushed to silence the lesser sounds about them.

How still it was! The whip-poor-will uttered its cry somewhere near them; then a shadowy thing swept by, close to the ground, almost touch-

ing the frock of snowy muslin. A river bass, gleaming as an armored knight in a shaft of sunshine, leaped from his buried fortress—some rash minnow or wandering beetle might then have told of the one-time sensations of a truant prophet of old. Then there came a flapping of huge wings, a hoarse scream,—and a blue heron, rising from a bleaching snag far out to midstream, wedged his awkward flight up the tree-flanked river corridor. Across the river, overlooking it, the village, and the far-stretching valleys, the Blue Mountains lifted their heads, about which gleamed the reflected tints of western cloud glory. But over their intersecting gorges hung black shadow-fringes, and deep gloom was falling upon the river.

"Say, Gogaphy," and Patsy's scarce audible voice trembled, "I 'm scared."

"'Taint nothin' goin' to hurt yer; I aint scared o' bull bats an' cranes—how about the sprinklin'?"

"Oh yes! Get the water."

"It's mighty nasty lookin'," commented the minister pro tem., eyeing the can of dark, fish-scented liquid dubiously.

"Pshaw!" grunted the boy. "I 've drunk it millions o' times."

"I can 't sprinkle you and hold you too."

"Guess when a fellow 's got no parents he 's got to stand on his own legs, aint he?"

"Gogaphy, there 's a drawback," Patsy said anxiously, her boldness in the faith wavering.

"Why don't yer sprinkle me, Mattie Pattie?"

"You 've never said catechism, have you Gogaphy? It 's awful."

"I 'll git a crick in my neck if yer don't git a hustle on, Mattie Pattie."

"I can 't think of a name."

"Spouse you use the one that belongs to me—it 's John Grigsby Lovelace. The boys call me Gogaphy, 'cause I beat 'em so bad in gogaphy an' my other books."

"That middle name sounds right much like an F. F. V., doesn't it?" exclaimed Patsy, encouraged.

"Jest 'cause it 's same as yours, I reckon." The suspicion of a sneer in his voice was lost on Patsy.

"Yes, isn't it funny," she answered. "Here, bend down so I can reach."

Just then a carriage, unnoticed, drove round the angle of the road.

"Patsy, my little daughter!" exclaimed some one inside.

"Oh, Papa, Papa!" screamed Patsy, dropping the tilted can onto the bowed head, and speeding as on wings to her father without so much as a backward glance.

Gogaphy watched the carriage until it stopped at the gateway on the hilltop. Then he sighed.

"Guess I 'm sprinkled anyway," he said, mopping his face and head with the faded shirt sleeve.

"Wonder what I must do now 'cause I 'm one of 'em?"

He looked down at his uncouth garments and scarred feet.

"Guess I 'll walk down past her gate to-morrow, anyway; and next month I 'll pick huckleberries on the mountain an' buy me some shoes."

How often, through that long, blissful summer, they met, and under what difficulties! With the boy it was a thing of little matter, for there were none to guard his young and groping footsteps. But the path of the little Patsy was paved with thorns.

Aunt Judy's notions concerning the respective relations of the "quality" and the unqualified were not chimeric, and she bore in her ebon countenance two very watchful eyes. Then there was Cousin Sarah, blue of blood as the coat of the great mountains when they stand forth in the clear sky of evening. She could present quite as stiff a backbone likewise when necessity prompted, and though she sometimes napped—for which assistance of Providence Patsy was often grateful,—still she became not seldom a stern tribunal of justice, for she was paid a goodly sum to guard the steps of the turbulent Patsy.

Sometimes it was a sly peep through the fence

that marked the thus-far line, with a nod and an exchange of favors—a can of huckleberries for a toil-worn catechism, a sucker for a book of hymn tunes—while often a well-known step sounded, approaching rapidly from the mansion.

But best of all were the steal-offs down through the park to the river. Then what fun!

He showed her in the ravine back of the house a whole colony of woodchucks—their burrows, rather, for woodchucks are sly codgers. She learned from him that the assemblage of buzzards over on the pine cliff after sunset was due to the fact that buzzards, like some children, are cowards if alone after bed hours. He taught her the sweet secret of the sugar maple, the elder bushes suffering much to supply material for drain-pipes. Together they dug the sweet-root—the tender sprouts of the hickory. Together they followed the undeviating course of the bee from a clover feast in the meadow to the hollow limb of an oak down by the river. For this secret, a fisherman rowed them across to where a gulch led up between two bold ridges. And here one day, some distance up the gorge, they found a hole that reached far back into a wall of rock, and about this hole the unmistakable signs of Reynard: many red hairs were about, also many feathers and the scattered remains of unfortunate cacklers; and once they had a glimpse of a small fluff-ball fleeing in at the door of his residence. This secret they guarded well

lest some avenger of the deaths of many innocents spare not mischievous lives.

And here, in the deep, cool river, Patsy first tasted the blisses of angling: hooking her own plump leg instead of a fish; tangling her line in some overhanging branch at every possible opportunity; imbedding the hook in submerged tree-trunks, and losing both hook and line, or else bringing to the surface—not a water monster—but some yards of dead tree branch or slimy river grass. What patience she displayed, and how it was unrewarded! Once only she landed a sucker, once a sun-perch, once a turtle, and once a writhing eel from which she fled in horror, but upon which her companion pounced as upon a treasure. As for the bass, they are much too wise to waste energy on a run with such an unaristocratic morsel as a mere earth worm in prospect.

But the hidden secret of anglers was with Gogaphy. For every nibble at hers, his hook landed a victim of no mean proportions. His bottle cork seemed drawn by some river deity, some enemy of the finny tribe, to the exact spot below which waited an eager and innocent sacrifice. His perseverance was phenomenal, and talk he would not, for Gogaphy was no bungler.

Sometimes, as they sat thus in silence, a king-fisher would come skimming upstream as a blue streak of flame against the green background, and, sitting for a moment upon the limb of a dead syc-

more, would regard them critically. Then a basso of the river-frog opera troop would sometimes startle them, himself, and the whole lot of his watery neighbors by an over-hurried descent from his stage beside them into his deep refuge,—an unnecessary precaution, but no one after hearing his quavering gutturals can deny him to be of a nervous temperament.

But one morning Patsy waked to find that the flowers had withered in the night, struck down by their enemy, the Hoar Frost. Downy snowflakes, escaping from the opening pods of the milkweed, scurried away on the breeze down toward the river. The chestnut-trees had cast their fruit in a night. The mountains were doffing their cool, green summer gowns for coats of warm russet, red, and yellow; and though the sun shone hot at midday, and the air of the valleys quivered with undulating waves of heat, at evening a chilling wind swept down from the hilltops—summer was dying.

Already the trunks had been packed. Patsy, her father, and Cousin Sarah would soon be off for the city.

How the child had implored her father, pressing wet cheeks to his, to leave the hateful city with its hard bricks and herds of human animals, and come to live here, where for generations their people had lived, died, and were buried, desiring nothing more in their living than the eternal peace about them; and in their death to lie at the feet of

those heights to which in life they lifted their eyes, worshipping toward those Higher Hills from whence their help came.

But plead as she would, the father would kiss her and say that it could not be. And thus was she to cherish but in memory for years the vision of a deep, green wildwood with its teeming denizens of a dark-flowing river, of a Blue Wall standing guard above, and of a boy in faded garments, whose bruised feet had guided her, and whose hand had opened to her the gate into that Paradise of childhood—the Elysian fields of Nature.

The carriage had reached the angle of the road at the foot of the hill, when Patsy's watchful eye spied a dejected heap of brown and blue sitting upon a log by the river. Her arms went quickly about her father's neck.

"Oh, Papa! please let me out one minute—just a minute! I want to tell—I want to see—oh, Papa!"

The carriage stopped. A small figure sped through the bushes, and a hand was laid on the bowed head. Gogaphy was crying, and tears were a disgrace in his eyes.

"Never mind, Gogaphy, I wont forget you, and you mustn't forget me neither. I brought you another catechism. It's Cousin Sarah's—I stole it."



“ A dark-flowing river — a blue wall above.”

"I've learned it by heart, backwards and forwards," blurted the boy.

"Well—good-bye!"

He dared not lift his red, swollen face to hers. Then she gave him her hand.

"Yon can kiss it once, Gogaphy, since you can't talk—just once, I said!" for the boy had seized the small hand eagerly, and pressed his hot lips again and again to the cool skin. His tears fell thick upon it.

"I wouldn't—be—such—a—fool," he stammered, "but now I haven't anybody (Gogaphy's grammar was much improved of late) to care—what becomes—of me; I haven't any parents—I haven't any friend but you, and now—you 're—gone—!" A violent fit of sobbing choked him.

"Patsy!" called her father.

Then she stooped over the bowed head and kissed the white forehead.

"Poor Gogaphy!" she said, weeping in sympathy. "I wont forget you—never, never! and some day I 'll come back."

She was gone.

The boy listened to the rolling wheels until their sound was lost far down the valley. Then he turned wearily, and threw himself face down on a cool moss-bed.

Hours after, a mutter of thunder roused him from a heavy slumber. He stood up blindly and

looked off to where the wall of rock interposed its barrier between him and an unknown Beyond, while his hand toyed with a chain of gold that lay about his neck beneath the shirt band. Then a gleam of glory came down from a gold-crowned peak and fell on Gogaphy's face. It was pale and the lips were set. But the light of a great purpose shone in the fine young eyes—the Heights were beckoning.

CHAPTER I

MOORETOWN

Have you not heard of Mooretown? Then you must be young. Had you reached your three-score line, you might better have known of her, for she is a thing of the past, though she knows it not. She is a relic of Virginia's most ancient and honorable aristocracy, an aristocracy the faint essence of which, here and there in dim, dusty corners, emanates from the person of some long-lingering remnant of those days of forgotten glory, just as the faint aroma from a withered petal pathetically suggests the fragrance of the full-blown rose.

And yet Mooretown is a town in truth by virtue of the following:

Two stores which for the world resemble two oblong goods-boxes left over from the days of the shipping of brocades, buckles, and perukes over seas. In these are kept calicoes and woolens of an ugliness past imagination; spools of colored thread such as one never matches in fabric of what shade soever; little mugs mottoed in anticipation of sad separations; yellow shoe-boxes, whose inmates may have come with the afore-mentioned brocades and perukes; leaky barrels of kerosene sitting in lover-like proximity to kegs of pale but

vigorous-smelling butter; vases of gaily decorated glass; sugar, salt mackerel, calomel pills, bacon, stick and gum candy, and small white china dogs and cats to sit on company mantel-shelves admiring the glass vases.

An inn; the building, a large brick one, being once the home of Colonel Alexander McCorkle, and now kept by Mrs. Carrie Martin, called "The Cuckoo" hereabouts because of a certain industrious propensity for prying into the secrets of other nests than hers.

A post office of some three-dozen pigeon-hole capacity. Here the mail is collected each morning and carried over ten miles of unpleasant road in a ramshackle cart, the old negro driver of which gets scarcely enough pay to replace the loss by death each year of one or more tuckered-out horses.

Then Mooretown has four churches, whose combined membership scarcely fills the only consequential church in the village. This multiplicity of churches seems a sad necessity, however, for it is not meet that a Second Family sit beside a First Family in worship, and there seems also to be a rank of Third Families so large that one building, of their pattern, will not accommodate them.

The length and breadth of Mooretown, too, is worthy of notice. In the days when my father played at fox-and-geese with other small village aristocrats, the town limit was from Miller's haybarn on the Willow Creek road to the Dunkard

meeting-house three miles up Moore's Creek. Now there is some dispute as to its extent. Some claim, the new sawmill far down the river and Squire Perkins' fine home five miles up Moore's Creek. But the sawmill is of an improved order and to be regarded suspiciously; while Squire Perkins is a newcomer and by no means First Family, though he could buy Mooretown with her shops and crumbling relics of grandeur, many times over.

But Mooretown is so Virginian and so aristocratic! There is so little of the strenuous life about her, and such a pervading aroma of dead ancestors! One can easily forgive her loose, long-drawn-out habits of life.

Neither will I strive, as the Judge's wife strives, to disturb that halo of restfulness that hovers over her, by the introduction of new ideas and methods. For the love of peace, I say, let there be one spot of rest on Earth! Let Mooretown herself go abroad and learn, as I have learned, of the seething fermentation of life in the world without. Soon she will flee back, as I have done, to rest her nerve-racked soul, nestling close under the shadowing mountains as the traveler rests in the shelter of some rock in a desert land.

But why, you ask, have I fled to Mooretown for refuge? I do not resent the question. It is quite in order, and has been for weeks. But answer it I cannot now and here, for I am not one to reveal things out of season. You will know soon

enough. I will, however, tell you what I must of myself—which is not agreeable to me—and of my journey on that day three weeks ago, when I waved a cheerful good-bye to lifelong comrades, to diminishing spires, and busy smoke-stacks, and turned my face eagerly toward the Blue Mountains of Old Virginia.

I had been, during my whole past life, as it were an amphibian, existing for the greater portion of the year one among myriads of tiny, insignificant creatures upon the restless, throbbing waves of city life. But, though tossed by billows of convention, and hurled upon hidden rocks of disaster, through it all there had beamed upon me, shining bright through the haloing distance of years, the memory of a summer—a summer now seventeen years dead—dreamed out in the seclusion of an ancestral home, a home to be mine henceforth by choice as well as by inheritance.

Left an orphan in early youth, brotherless and sisterless, my life had been one of unwonted freedom; and, save for cousins of the fourth degree, whose unchristian remarks about me often reached a like degree of intensity, I had been gloriously independent. No, not independent either, for that monster, Conventionality, had forced my consent to the presence of a companion. She, or rather, they, had been selected from time to time from among unencumbered kinswomen, and had opened up an easy and useful channel for the communica-



“An ancestral home — to be mine henceforth.”

tion of evidence concerning my daily walk to other interested relatives. At the time of which I am to write my cousin, Peggy Jane Chandler, was with me—but of her you will hear more hereafter.

My friends had grieved me sorely on that morning in early October when they stood about the car window while the train was puffing to be off with me and my worldly possessions. They showed little of that enthusiasm over my approaching felicitous change that I felt was due me; in fact they seemed to pity me. But I regarded them with the commiseration that they deserved, invited them to visit me in my mountain exile, and left them without a tear.

And why should I not be happy? Was I not shaking off forever the old life that, with all its glamour, had proved to me a hollow mockery? Was I not soon to realize that which had formed a picture in my brain—a winter, henceforth my life of winters—in the country? My heart bounded at the prospect, and the train seemed to crawl, so eager was I for a sight of the mountains.

At something past midday we reached Harper's Ferry of John Brown fame. Here we entered the Valley. At once the stuffy atmosphere clinging about us since morning gave place to perceptibly cooler, more bracing air, air that seemed carefully sifted of infecting germs and teeming with ozone and intoxication. From the rocky fastnesses of the Ferry the train dashed out and up, over low-

lands dotted with cornstalk wigwams, while further back rose verdant foothills flecked with fat herds and the homesteads of the farmers, lying white and peaceful amidst much plenty. By our side flowed placidly the shining Shenandoah, "Daughter of the Stars," as the Indian warrior called her; and where now he rests his tomahawk and his mouldering bones under some forgotten mound beside her, the engine bore us on, while she passed us tranquilly by, keeping watch, as for centuries she has done, over his mound and the restless tramp of civilization that broke his proud spirit.

Then a lonely peak stood out from the blue mist and doffed his cap. Heigh-ho, old fellow, there you are! There stand two lovers side by side, while against them nestle smaller ones—their children—numerous and hardy as the sons of the farmers. How beautiful they are in their October glory! The brilliant red of the dogwood; the fiery sumac and maple; the crimson gum-tree, the yellow hickory, the russet oak; and the eternal green of the pine, as he, immortal among trees, and longing for higher things, reaches up and up toward Heaven—home of Immortals.

In the meantime we made many stops. We changed cars to all points of the compass, and in changing, wrought sorrow to a mother alone with three children under the age of four, to a spinster with many bundles and more nerves, and to three wives who were frantic for fear their husbands

would be left—or would *not* be, I could never guess which. There was a repeated demand, and consequent scuffling for tickets; that caused me much sorrow, as I could never find mine and the continual hunt for it gave me no time to nap.

I noted with some surprise that, as we made our way up the valley, and stopped at innumerable cooplike stations, everyone who entered the car seemed to know everyone within. Many and fond relationships, too, seemed to exist. Uncle John entered with Aunt Sally, and half of the car's inmates proceeded to overwhelm them. Cousin Mary kissed Cousin Abner through the window; while Aunt Susan came near to being left, so much was there to be related of the whooping cough and the new minister to the nieces on the platform.

These demonstrations I hailed with joy; they were so democratic, so Virginian! Considering myself now Virginian and democratic, I looked about me for relatives to embrace, and with whom to discuss existing conditions. I saw none, though a youth of good appearance seemed prone to offer some exchange of privileges. He bore no family resemblance to me, however, for he was of the carrot hair and coloring, while I am quite the opposite. Perhaps he was no First Family. Considering this, and what I was to be forthwith, I gave him a cold shoulder, and gave myself to the contemplation of Nature.

It should be mentioned here that I did not travel

alone. Other members of my family were en route with me, though, compelled by an unsympathetic train official, they traveled just ahead. I must introduce them:

Topsy, an ill-tempered fox terrier, who would not be left; nor could a friend be found willing to accept him in loving remembrance.

Chica, a bit of maltese fluffiness that I call "Puss" because, when I call her name to strangers, I am always asked to repeat it.

Jed and Jemima, snow-white of plumage, Christian in name, Mormon in faith, Plymouth Rock by breed, and aristocratic. Jed's reputation as a politician soon spread among the trainmen and newsboys. His stump speeches were reported wonders in eloquence and volume. (I hope he did well for his party and will cast his vote for the right man. I presume he has a vote. The law debars "women, children, and idiots," but it says nothing against political roosters.)

Besides these members of my family, from whom I was unwillingly separated, was Dilly. She rode just ahead in the Jim Crow, and is my best friend. Some things are inscrutable to me, and one is that Dilly, who loves me and to whom I confide my ailments, that Dilly, who bosses me, should ride in the Jim Crow—perhaps some of them are not Dillys.

Late that afternoon, as we neared the terminus, I stood on the rear platform watching the sunset.



The "Nunnery."

Awed by the contemplation, I pictured fairy dwellings among those crimson and purple cloud castles, or the homes of angels. And I seemed to see those shining ones take shape and float upward, beckoning.

Suddenly I knew that some one stood near, watching *me*, not the sunset. By way of introduction, I stammered something about the glory of mountain sunsets; whereupon she cooled my ardor by remarking,

"We 're used to those things. I tell by 'em when it 's time to slop the hogs."

I could only murmur something of the joy of slopping hogs by glorious sunsets. Then she asked if I was from the city; adding to my weak confession, that she thought so, in a tone of voice that quite humbled me.

Uncle Isham, an ancient retainer of the Grigsbys, was to meet me with my surrey. As the locomotive came to a stop, I spied his gnarled figure, holding my prancing chestnuts by the bits. With such a home-coming swelling of heart as I had never before felt I bounded from the train and with a glad cry ran toward him.

But here something happened.

As I hurried around the station, an old man, grizzled and misshapen as I could see him in the evening shadows, hobbled out from under the projecting eaves, and, stopping in front of me, glared into my face. Then there leaped into his eyes a gleam of recognition, and savage exultation over-

spread his face. As I drew back shuddering, he grinned; his small eyes glittered in their shaggy setting, and he hobbled back and left me, a cold fear gripping my heart at this my first home greeting.

CHAPTER II

THE "NUNNERY"

You must leave the road that folds itself about the village at the top of the hill, pass through a rickety gate in the rail fence, and penetrate some three hundred yards into the woods to your right, to find the Nunnery.

That I should have given this rather uncalvinistic name to the honored seat of a Valley Presbyterian family, has been the source of some useless comment among the cousins. My hope is that some of them will understand the significance of the name and direct their movements accordingly.

The house, built in the regulation colonial style, is square in the main portion, roomy, wide of hall, and redolent of forebears and lavender. A carven staircase of oak mounts, with many landings, to the attic. On the first of these landings stands my great-grandfather's clock, as irascible and as uncertain of movement as its owner would have been had he, too, remained in active operation until now. A veranda, many-columned, surrounds the house on three sides, and is most dear to me. There is nothing about my Nunnery to suggest defense unless it be these sentinel-looking pillars, that, reaching from veranda to roof, have stood guard

over my people for four generations. From early childhood I recall them, towering ghostly white in the light of the summer moon, and casting long shadows, very ominous and silent. On mild nights I used to sit by the hour watching the moon and the fairies that seemed to me to slide up and down her mystic rays, playing at hide-and-seek behind the stately columns. Here, too, in a spirit of weird fancy, I loved to sit and read ghost stories in the mellow light, or recite to the moon and her fairies those eerie ballads, "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "The Skeleton In Armour."

To the left of the veranda lies the old rose garden, out of which my grandmother, Patsy, was wont to cull rare, sweet-breathed roses, treading with satin-slippered feet between beds of marigolds and asters, her skirts kissed by the breath of lavender and thyme. I have great hopes for this garden, for flowers love me. And how I toil with them, while I am not able to sweep, to dust, nor even to sew, counting it not labor for the love I bear them!

In front, and to the right of the veranda, is a small yard, terraced, and girt about by a low wall of stone half hidden by honeysuckle and Virginia creeper. In this wall is a depression where steps lead down into the Jungle—my most cherished possession. Not even the Nunnery itself do I except; for in it are passed many restless nights,



“Watching the moon and the fairies.”

while the days are all too short to develop the blissful possibilities of my Jungle.

It is one tangle of wild-vine, deadwood, and underbrush over all its many acres; and over this confusion is spread, as if to guard its sacredness, a vast forest roof, under whose eaves will be much love-making by feathered fops when green blinds are again hung up at tree windows next spring. I, too, will see to it that no ax be laid upon my Jungle. As if a senseless implement of iron, of man's device, could beautify in aught the work of the Mother of all things beautiful! What if the path be hidden by training grape, dewberry vine, and the over-branching laurel and dogwood! What if the chestnut, the locust, and the flowering catalpa shake down their useless limbs and faded garments in autumn! Will these dead not rise again in a renewed vigor of the exhausted soil, and thereby in greener leaves and more seductive fragrance? I am Nature's child, and when were she and the world ever on speaking terms! Gathering her treasures close to her mother heart, from before man's foot she flees in terror. Away from her arching dome he hides himself behind cold, dead stone. Her carpet of velvet green he delves that he may place for himself habitations of brick and mortar. Her forest canopy he fells, sending her frightened denizens to other lands for shelter. It is my pride that she shows herself friendly to

me, and that her wild children flee not in terror at my approach.

In yonder hawthorn bush at the turn of the path, you may discover the lattice-work house of My Lady Catbird; her summer residence it is, for even now she is getting together her belongings for the slipping away. His Lordship sits there on that bare locust. He knows he is safe, and if you but listen, he may favor you with a whole comedy in opera. And yonder, in that green covert, that brown prima donna of birds is wont to pour out her arias of celestial rapture. I came upon her there once—shy lyrist that she is, simple in dress, and, as the truly great, unassuming in manner.

And the bob-whites, for whose pasture I have ordered that an adjoining field of stubble be left, have learned that the Jungle is to be sacred to their hiding. Poor little innocent fellows! If ever a sportsman follows them into this their refuge, I will not spare him.

During these weeks in which I have been living at the Nunnery I have done little work. Work is not one of my innate, compelling principles; and here Carlyle and I differ, for Carlyle preached work and was miserable, while I do nothing and am happy. Uncle Isham, Aunt Judy—his wife—and Cousin Peggy Jane do the work, while I manage. Dilly manages me.

The managing I have done has been to keep



“ ‘Dilly manages me.’ ”

out of doors, drinking in the peace and quiet restfulness diffusing from the full maturity of Nature about me. I seem to have waked up suddenly from a nightmare, and to have discovered myself basking in the full blisses of Eden. I seem to have been ushered into my kingdom, the kingdom of my lost childhood, lost by years of artificial horrors, brought back by one breath of fragrant wood stretches, by one glad rush out into the frosty crispness of an October morning. I dance in pure delight, and hug great tree-trunks, who, because of their dignity and weight of years, respond by not the slightest shrug of their shoulders. The chincapin, sassafras, and cedar bushes slap my face familiarly, and I feel no resentment. I gather hawberry clusters of ebon blackness, and deceive myself into an enjoyment of their nastiness. I find a stray violet hid away in some spot on the brookside, and kiss it to death for sheer love of it. A single hepatica, too, deceived into life by a traitor breeze whispering of spring, sometimes lifts to mine a gentle, tear-dimmed eye of blue, and so do anemones, fragile as city maidens.

I lie on fragrant moss-beds, face upwards, while over me is kept up an industrious clatter among the leaves of the beeches. The oak, for some unknown offense, pelts me with his cupped fruit and cast-off clothing, while squirrels scuttle down trees to demand favors. I stroll through great alley-

ways of trees, and am reminded of some ancient votary led on through a corridor of Corinthian columns to the shrine of sacrifice. I sit on some mound, the grave of a tree, perhaps, or—who can tell?—the tomb of some fallen hero of a vanquished race. Poor warrior! How free was his life and how he loved it! Now his race is scattered, his life forgotten. But his unbroken spirit to-day plies its loved employment in the glades of his Happy Hunting-Grounds. I seem to hear his flying footsteps; and I wonder if his bones still lie clutching his tomahawk, or have they long since yielded up their dust to the dust of their cherished sod? Far-off, sweet melodies fall on my ear; odors of incense float over; bright wings speed flashing by; and I start as swift feet rush past and scramble up scraggy tree-trunks—Ugh, you little brute! you frightened me.—There were passing before me, to the air of the grand march of the centuries, the tragedies of the primeval forest; a glade in the depths of an awful wilderness; the stealthy tread of the savage; the pioneer, carving with rude ax from the wilderness about him a home for a numerous progeny; the beast of prey, lurking in dark places to pounce upon his victim. Had this morning been that morning, had I been that victim! A crouch, head downward, a gleam of green eyeballs, a silent spring, a roar in my ear, the fang in my neck, and I had

known in death the mysteries of that life in which I now blindly grope.

Thus have I lived out of the house while much has gone on within it,—scrubbing, papering, painting, and like work, such as is necessary to the living of life, yet scarcely to be lived through. A furnace in the cellar has conquered the cold clamminess of the country hallway. An acetyline gas plant has replaced the dim unstableness of lamps. Electric bell-wires afford possibilities for tight-rope walking to many rats (already the loud clanging of these bells has disturbed my night's rest not once nor twice). And I also have a bath, for, though rural, I purpose to be clean.

The furniture, what little I had (and what proved to be about twenty wagon-loads), hauled over ten miles of road typically Virginian, together with certain other pieces of great age, unsteadiness of limb and correspondent value—left me with the homestead,—had now been set in order. The woodshed was stacked roof-high with logs of oak and hickory for the sitting-room grate. A bursting bin of coal waited in the cellar for the furnace and the kitchen range. Potatoes and apples peeped from their crowded compartments in the storage cellar; while mounds scattered about over the garden marked the resting places of beets, of turnips, and of cabbages. In the wine cellar were rows on rows of jars, marked in hieroglyphics known only to Aunt Judy. She has been at work on the contents of those jars since June; and, judg-

ing from the barrels of sugar she has had me order, there must be enough sweetness in that wine cellar to take the bitterness out of the lives of all Virginians.

And now, come on King Winter, when you will! There is grain and hay for the horses and for Buttercup, the Jersey. There is food for us all, and shelter from the tempest. There are cob pipes and much tobacco for Uncle Isham, quilt patches for Aunt Judy, and abundant needle gymnastics for Cousin Peggy; there are friends for Dilly; Topsy has a coon dog—adopted against my consent—and Uncle Isham's lean hound, Driver, besides a whole retinue of starved dog-neighbors; Puss has friends of every size, shape, color, and vocal capacity; and, as for me, I have shelves on shelves of them, the dearest, truthfulest friends one ever had. I turn to their covers and forget the world and my troubles as I delve deep into those storehouses of many minds, and bring up thence rich and rare treasures.

CHAPTER III

TRESPASSERS

One morning late in October, having heard the thunderings of war down in the Jungle toward the river I sallied forth, ostensibly to gather nuts, but in reality to wreak vengeance on some invader, storming the sacred precincts of my fortress.

Gaining the river, I followed up to where the forest gave place to the field of dry grass and stubble. Here, under a barren nut-tree, I began a diligent search for nuts, and waited.

It was not for long. There was one sharp report, then another up the edge of the woods, the quick bark of a dog, a whir-ir-ir of swift wings, and he fell just at my feet, a poor, wee martyr, dying in agony.

Following a sure scent came the setter—a fine specimen, bronze-red, long-haired, sharp-nosed, eager. He had well-nigh absconded with the quivering victim ere I could snatch it. Mingled fury and pity possessed me as I contemplated the little fellow, stroking its mottled breast and crested head. Then, dropping the bird, I pounced upon the accomplice in crime, who stood irresolutely by, uncertain, as are often others of his sex, whether to flee or stand his ground in face of fem-

inine wrath. Shaking him vigorously by the collar, I told him many things, to which he listened as a well-bred gentleman should. Then, longing to get my hand upon a corresponding article on his master's person, I turned, with intent to follow the escaping dog, and, perhaps, to execute this desire. But something stopped me: lying close to shore near me, and anchored by a steel chain to the root of a cottonwood, was a tiny skiff. Made of canvas, and scarcely longer than a man, it sat, swaying in the breeze that tumbled down from the hilltops, riding the sleeping surface of the water as lightly as a spray of thistledown rides the air.

As often as I had rowed my own light skiff of steel up and down the river track during these few weeks, I had never before seen this fragile water sprite. Just so, on a day long gone, might another bark of skin or birch have paused a moment here on its swift-winged flight adown the broad current while on a mat in its bottom, her hands toying with the water, her black hair kissing its bosom, an Indian maiden might have rested, waiting the step of her lover. Following a foolish impulse (as I often do), I unloosed the anchor, sprang within the skiff, and, crossing with easy strokes to the opposite bank, made upstream a short distance to where the low-spreading boughs of a spruce-tree formed a protecting screen.

Under this I drifted, drove the oar into the yielding clay bottom for anchor, and waited.

It was yet early morning. The warm rays of the October sun sifted through the roof of green above, in kaleidoscopic chasing of light and shadow. Two grosbeaks, returning from a foraging tour to find their house occupied, sped away as two flashes of fire. A kingfisher skimmed down from a high perch, and seizing an overbold minnow close to my retreat, made off, light as a spirit's wing, upstream. A glamour was in my eyes; sylvan music struck my ear; a voice called to me down the dim corridor of the past—the voice of a barefoot boy. The bellow of the river, as it leaped from the breastworks of the old dam, came to me from down the winding track. Then, swooping down the deep, uneven current of my life, came the memory of those happy hours with him, revived by the familiar scene about me.

Was I that small, brown maiden? I looked at my hands, then buried them in the water to see which was the blacker. And her curls? Flinging my hat at my feet, I removed pin after pin with trembling hands, and let fall a mass of waving tresses. Then I hummed softly:

I heard not a sound as I lay

But the kiss of the shore and the sea;

Yet voices rang clear, from far and from near,

That long ago whispered to me.

A familiar sound drew me back to the present—the chattering of a squirrel. Looking across the river I detected a gray pennant, bobbing energetically in the crotch of the barren hickory. I had before warned that rascal of the danger of rowdyism; yet there he sat on his pet seat, impudent and defiant. Already the leaves rustled from somewhere across the river: my heart tightened. Yet I was powerless to aid him, for, with unerring sense, he would place any sound I might make in his behalf and scuttle round the tree from me, and into full view of the sportsman.

Then a dry twig under the man's boot snapped loudly. Such a splendid blunder! The squirrel scrambled to the ground like a streak, and, eluding several impossible shots, reached his hole in safety.

I could hear how feelingly the hunter spoke of the incident. Then, peeping through my green lattice, I saw him.

He was not a warrior in feathers, beads, and wampum; he was not the spirit of my childhood's dream; he was not even young and personable. He was old; his hair was white; his beard was long and white also and his garments unkempt and ill-fitting as any scarecrow's.

As I watched him, wondering, he turned, and with a whistle to his dog, strode with springing step to the water's edge. Now was I in for it! He hastily scanned both shores, up and down. He went far below, pushing aside heavy willow

screens. He glared right across into my retreat, but the shadows befriended me. Then he whistled—the clear whistle of the quail in autumn,—repeated the call, and waited.

Soon a rustle in the bushes back and to the left of me drew my attention. Somebody was coming down the gulch that bored its way back and up into the very heart of the rock wall; coming stealthily, too, as a cat creeping—nearer, then stopped not twenty yards downstream from my hiding place.

It was a girl with long, black hair that hung about her face and from beneath the sunbonnet in the back. But her face I could not see, for she seemed uneasy, keeping behind the trees on the river bank. She said nothing.

“The boat is gone. Have you seen it?” the man called over.

The girl shook her head.

“Has any person crossed to our shore?”

Again that voiceless response.

“Follow the stream down—it could not have drifted upstream—perhaps those hanging boughs have lodged it.”

The girl soon returned and wagged a negative. She was evidently dumb.

“Then we must swim it, old boy,” he said turning to the red setter. “’Twill serve the fleas a turn for their diligence.”

He took off his coat and belt of cartridges, then laid his hand to the button at his throat.

The joke was going too far. Standing up in my uncertain cradle so hastily that I came near to losing my balance, I pushed aside the branches and called over merrily, though my teeth smote:

Wilt give to me a silver crown
To row thee o'er the ferry?

There was a hoarse cry beside me, and a rush of footsteps. The girl had dashed back into the black-shadowed gorge. But I paid her no heed. It was upon the old man that I gazed with increasing astonishment. On hearing my voice, he started. Then hastily donning his coat and pressing his hat well over his eyes, he turned to see whence the voice came. No sooner had he seen me, than an unconscious cry of surprise or pain escaped his lips; and, letting the gun fall to the ground, he leaned against a tree for support. What surprised me most was this: in that moment of time, his figure, before so much at odds with the snowy hair and beard in its bouyant stepping, changed instantly into the stooping form of the old man.

The boat, that I had now pushed out into the current, began floating aimlessly downstream. The oars lay in the bottom; while I sat with one hand clutching the side, the other brushing fran-

tically at some mist, that, rising suddenly from the river, seemed to envelop me.

He was the first to speak, calling in a cracked voice in which I detected a tremor of emotion:

Dryad, river nymph, or sprite,
Fair, naughty gaoler, come! Thy prisoner,
Ancient, grizzled and chattering, waits,
Ignorant, thy purpose and his doom.

"Good gracious! Who are you?" I gasped, dumfounded at this sudden lapse into the classics.

"Thy prisoner, nymph, an exile on an alien shore."

"Rather that sleeper, Rip Van Winkle, you seem to me."

"I sleep not, but await my doom, sweet one."

"Unless you give your name, the night will end the day and find us here, old man," I replied warmly. Then, rowing out to midstream, I drifted, eyeing him carefully.

This seemed distasteful to him for he hobbled back from the shore—a veritable goblin of the hills. Then he seated himself on the root of the hickory and quietly waited my next whim.

I rowed close to shore.

"I have not the honor of your acquaintance, old man. Why have I not seen you during these days I have spent here on the river?"

He started up hastily, and retreated further into the woods.

"I am the Sang Digger of Hell-Gate Hollow," he replied, pointing over to the gorge at whose entrance huge rocks loomed their shoulders up from the water's edge. "Upon those wooded slopes I ply my search for the sacred root; and on yon ridge, where now that shadow sits, stands a hut of mud and limestone: there I live, and there I sing, for an ancient bard am I—the bard of the hilltops."

Pleased at his quaint manner of speech, I encouraged him:

"And the girl who ran from me—is she dumb?"

"You saw her?" he asked eagerly.

"Not well," I replied, "but I would like to hear more of her, for, some way, I know she suffers."

"'Tis my child, the child of my sorrow—dumb, and a prey to a dread malady," he answered, looking away from me. I saw that his hand, which was white and shapely, trembled, and womanlike, I pitied him in his sorrow, and wished to comfort.

"If you will take me to her, perhaps I may help her. Has she a mother?"

"We live alone," he answered simply.

"Then she needs a woman's care—you would not mind?"

He made no answer; then, coming close to shore, I made busy to land, while he stood silently by, offering me no aid. As I scrambled with much difficulty up the bank, something slipped past me, an oar splashed, and ere I could gain my feet to

look about, the skiff was well on its way across the river, darting as a water-fowl, straight to the mouth of Hell-Gate Hollow.

"Now by all ancientry, who is he?" I gasped, sitting flat on the ground upon the bodies of two partridges, and gazing after the speeding craft until it was lost in the heavy evergreen boughs that fringed the ravine's mouth. Then, reminded too late of my mission to the river, I rose in disgust at myself and the whole awkward affair, and turning, spied on the ground near me, where the man had donned his coat, an old-fashioned locket that I knew I had seen before—where and when, I could not tell. Inside was the face of a young woman in the headdress and costume of some thirty years before. The face, with its great eyes and broad forehead, was beautiful with that illusive beauty of mind and spirit. And as I gazed upon it with ever-increasing fascination, there came to me the impression of a resemblance between this and another face most treasured in my memory—a face which I wore in a locket about my neck.

Taking the locket from my dress I laid the face of my father beside that other one on my palm. How alike they were!

Then, hastening to the water's edge, I peered across to the mouth of the gorge. No one was to be seen.

"You dropped your locket, Sang Digger!" I

called. But my voice came back to me, answering. So, fastening the lockets together, I placed them about my neck and turned homeward, resolved to cross to the mountain at some more favorable time, and, searching out the hut of the old man, restore to him the locket.

On reaching the Nunnery and hearing the din and clatter of broom and dustpan in my room above, I escaped to the library, and flinging my hat and gloves upon the table, threw myself upon a bear rug before the grate.

This room was my sanctuary. To its dim, still refuge I had already learned to flee in times of joy or bitterness. Down from the high walls an array of worthy ancestors regarded me. Here stood the grand piano with which I loved to while hours of sweet companionship. And here about the walls were the heavy bookcases, built of walnut more than a century old, and full of treasures. For my people had been book-lovers, reading much and the best, and bringing from travels abroad rare volumes to rest behind these heavy glass doors of their secure abiding places.

I had not rested an instant here, sprawled out on the rug, until I became conscious of another presence in the room, and following the telepathic influence, I glanced over to the line of bookcases.

The result was electric. Leaping to my feet, I grabbed my sunshade and clapped it close over my tousled head. The blood, mounting swiftly

up from my toe-tips, thumped its way to my throat and over my face, which, fortunately, is not fair. I was trapped.

The subject of my chagrin stood over near the window, book in hand, examining me carefully. I could see with what ill success he struggled to master a smile that played about his lips, and my discomfort was not thereby diminished.

He was small—I might have reached to his eyes—and slender, yet I could see through my rising fury that he was of a dignity of poise and grace of bearing that stamped him at once a man of power and promise.

“Well,” I spluttered at length, as he seemed too well satisfied to speak, “well, what do you think of me?”

“I think you might reach to my shoulder.”

I winced, for it is not pleasant to be reminded of one’s diminutiveness.

“Did you come through the keyhole?” I retorted. “Such a feat might be possible to you?”

“Miss Grigsby met me on the veranda, and turned me in here to graze amid green pastures”—he indicated the bookshelves. “She seemed to be in the throes of house-cleaning, and I should have taken my departure, but one has not often the privilege to bow to so large an assembly of great ones.”

“Miss Grigsby” indeed! I gasped under my breath. Then came to me a vision of Cousin Peggy Jane, girt about the head with a towel, her

skirts folded well up from filthy contact, plying her beloved task—and mistaken for me!

Suddenly an idea seized me which my appearance might justify.

"She'll be back inside an hour; don't let me worry you—just slipped in to rest a spell—didn't know you was in here. House-cleanin'? Well, I reckon! That woman don't rest or let me or the dust rest either!"

He drew himself up with much show of scandalized dignity, and feigned to resume his bowing to great ones. I could see, however, how much of his attention he gave the books, and how much to me.

I now began a crablike movement toward the door—to no purpose, for he came over at once and stopped me.

"As my call is professional—"

"You're a book agent, ain't you?"

"—I desire to include all members of this—"

"Oh yes, you're one of these picture men. Got any to beat these?" I designated an array of offended forebears.

"You mistake my errand, Miss," he replied, returning to the shelves, whence he took down volume after volume, replacing each after scarcely more than a glance.

Watching him from the doorway, I possessed myself of the composure that seemed deserting him. Then I giggled and simpered.

"It 's 'most like one of them President's receptions."

"Pardon me, Miss?"

"If you 're holding receptions with them books, you don't linger long over the handshakings."

"Pray call your mistress, girl!" he thundered, whacking a large, brown volume back into its crevice topsy-turvy.

"You put Froude's Life of Jane Welsh Carlyle back on her head didn't you?" I asked as a final shot, turning to the door.

By the door stood the card-stand, on which lay a small, white card—a newcomer. My eye caught the name thereon.

"Good Gracious!" I gasped, and turning, fled precipitately into the arms of Cousin Peggy.

"For the love of Heaven, Patsy!" She thrust me at arm's length and looked me over. "You in there, and like this!—child, child! You mortify me!"

"Sh—sh—!" I managed to articulate. He 's still in there—— he 'll hear you!—he, the idol of Mooretown's women and infants! You told me he was away, and I've called him a—book agent!"

Conscious of two pairs of eyes upon me I mounted the stairs two steps over. Then, gaining a secure refuge beyond the first landing, I stopped to draw breath—not to listen.

The minister was the first to recover.

"She is very sociable—the girl. Who is she?" I fancied I detected some eagerness behind his carefully guarded words.

"Sociable!" exclaimed my cousin with her nose I knew to be at what angle, "Sociable! Well, I guess she is when there's a man about! That's my cousin and ward, Patsy Grigsby."

So intense a silence ensued, the creaking of a board beneath my softly ascending footsteps reverberated through the hallway as the blast of a toy cannon.

CHAPTER IV

MYSTERIES, AND STRANGE MUSIC

"Dilly," said I, as she gave my hair its nightly brushing, "who was that sitting beside you on the woodpile this evening after tea?"

"La, Miss Patsy! Don' you know dat sanctimonious punkin-faced nigger? Dat was Mr. Anthony Hartwell—de Reverend Anthony dey calls 'im."

"Is he a married man?" I ventured.

"Not at de present, Miss; leastways dey say he done kilt two wives in washin' an' toilin' fur de cloes he wars in de wurk o' de ministry."

"Perhaps he detects martyr blood in you, Dilly?"

"Ain 't you 'shamed, Miss Patsy! I got ter see de nigger yit whar I gwine ter be slave ter—washin' dey shuts, an' warin' de meat offen meh bones pamperin' dey laziness—dat I is!"

"Then you should not encourage him, girl."

"What you call 'couragin', Missis? He jes' drapped round in de intrust ob de flock; sez deys a big meetin' called on fur nex' comin' Sunday two weeks runnin'!"

"Where, Dilly?" She was never on hand for the hair brushings during "big meetin's."

"Down dyar at Mount Zion furninst de factory dis side de ribber. Its upward o' three mile, but he low dat aint fur, leanin' on de sperrit."

"Dilly," said I with a boldness that had not been mine had she been facing me, "did you give the Reverend Anthony his supper?"

"I ain't followin' de movements o' dat coon, Miss."

"Aunt Judy says he ate four yeast rolls, a pound of fried bacon, a dish of stewed fruit, and drank a boiler of coffee. Now I can keep—"

"Den why you ax me? Course you gwine b'lieve dat ole shrivel-face liar! Ise gwine kill dat ole nigger yit."

"You were in the kitchen with him the whole time he was there—strange you did not—"

"Ise got more importanter wurk ter do den gapin' roun' at niggers eatin' bacon an' apples—dat what Aunt Judy busify *her* time wid! 'Deed, Miss Patsy, good ez you is, you shore does 'sprize me. You sutiny aint gwine grudge de cup o' cole water ter de Lord's saervent."

"Now, you know I am not stingy, Dilly, but indeed,"—she was now blubbering and jerking my head to all points of the compass—"indeed, I propose to reserve some rights of entertainment for myself. I can keep no high-class restaurant for your admirers."

"La—a—Mi—iss—Patsy!"

"Last night it was Deacon Minor; the night be-

fore, Jack and Abram; last Sabbath, the Reverend Johnson—”

“La—a, Mi—iss—P—a—t—sy! ain ’t you ’sha—amed to ’buse me dat wa—ay!”

“But Dilly, Aunt Judy says—”

“Ole leather-face witch! What she know ’bout nothin’? Jes’ an’ ole up-country hag—a ’spises her!”

“I, myself, saw that man embrace you out on the woodpile to-night.”

“Now Miss Patsy! does you think Ise sich lowdown trash ez ter let a gem’man squeeze me on dat pile o’ logs? I was, to be truthful, settin’ kinder close to dat nigger ’cause he allers talks in dat reverential tone o’ voice dat he use to retch de seekers. Dat woodpile ain’t jes’ steddy like, an’ it whoppled over—it ’s de Lord’s truth—an’ wid dat I screech out an’ dat man up an’ clamp me—La, I was dat skeered!”

“Was there any use for that affectionate position to be sustained for a half-hour?”

“Can’t I ’splain nothin’ ter yo’ satisfactionment, Miss? Dat log gave meh foot an uncomforble wrench, it sutiny did; an’ de misery tech me up till I mought o’ swoon, or I mought o’ drap off in a doze—ain’t I done hyar you say dis mountainaceous air meck one dat sleepyfied?”

“Go to bed, Dilly!” I exclaimed in despair. I had long since learned the elastic properties of Dilly’s tongue.

She, ever faithful, remained however. She toyed with my hair, which was her pride, and curled the long ringlets about her finger caressingly.

"Why don' you never git married, Missis?" she asked softly after a long silence between us. "Women folks, an' 'speshully de high-steppin' little uns like you kyarnt knock 'bout in dis worl' by deyselves. When de black gals gits married de chances is deys settin' deyselves up fur knocks an' scufflin'. But youse jes' like dat Firginy creeper out on dat wall; you mought be out doin' rank an' thrivin' in de spring an' summer, but whar you gwine hole to when de winds o' winter tetches yer an' de snow tromples yer? Yes seh! [Dilly talks to men oftenest] dis lonesome house an' de little Missis needs a big, strong boss."

I thought it wise to say nothing, and she went on:

"Ain't I done seen dese same rings wropped roun' moren a dozen hearts! Dar was dat high-stepper, Colonel Allen, an' dat rich ole skunk whar tried ter buy yer wid diamonds dat some folks sez was paste; he shore did paste his 'flections ter de wrong jewel dat time, shore. Den dar was Marse Warren—dat man sutiny did set a heap o' store by you, Miss Patsy; peared like dey want no cranny ob his heart you hadn't crawled into. I wonders sometimes whar dat man gone—you think he shore 'nouf dead or

drownded? Yes seh," she went on as I was still silent, "dem swells did sutiny pester you, an' comin' to de country ain't gwine shake 'em off—deys dat pernacious!"

She had finished the brushing. Then, turning down the coverlid and thumping up an immaculate pillow, she brought me cool water and my night-dress, and left me.

Some of my friends, who have never been blessed with Dillys, wonder at my long-suffering and forbearance with her. They say I am "easy-going," and that I allow her to do and talk as she pleases; they say also, that they too could keep their Dillys did they choose to suffer what I suffer. In truth they, girt about with the armor of defiance and rushing hourly to conflict with spears of innuendo and fault-finding, are able to keep their servants a week, a day perhaps, or oftenest, not at all. To these I say, "You will never know the secret of maid and mistress, for you yourselves, perhaps, were born to serve. You cannot govern wisely; you are neither considerate nor respectful; you have no care that they love you."

And this is our secret—Dilly's and mine. She is, I sorrow to confess, far from perfect; she scolds, advises, and is willful. But she loves me with a love that will wear her fingers to the bone for me when the need comes. As for me, why should I not prefer her, whose love is no matter

of doubt, to those who love or hate me in proportion to the number of visits I pay them a year, or the number of chairs I happen to possess over and above them!

That night I sat long before the fire in my room with Puss curled in my lap, and Topsy asleep on the hearth rug. The wind whistled around chimney corners, and shutters, insecurely fastened, slammed here and there over the old house, yet I feared to go to close them. It stalked, a veritable ghost, up and down the corridors, and at times I started up and looked at the doors, half expecting the entrance of some grim visitant.

That my house is haunted I had heard from childhood. But I loved the air of mystery pervading it, and that hovering about me, as it were, of an innumerable company. The worn door-sills; the pencil-marks; the little finger-prints; the batterings,—these proclaimed them, my ghosts of the past. And to-night I sat and pictured them passing up and down the stairway to the tick of the clock on the landing. Brave men were among them, and honorable; lovely women too, with curls flowing over white, sloping shoulders. And I heard the others also—the tiny footsteps—pattering up and down, and the merry prattle of children's voices. The garret teems with their treasures: garments, costly and comical; fans, caps, waterfalls and perukes; daguerreotypes,—of whom, there is none to tell; bundles of old letters,

bearing no stamp, and odd-shaped; sheep-skin parchments—grants of land, bearing the seal of His Majesty George the Second, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith.

So I fear them not—these ghosts of mine. I revere their memory. I stretch out to them empty, yearning arms across fathomless abysses. Ere long I, too, shall join them. Then, sometimes, on nights like these, I shall betake myself back to wander up and down these hallways, and to sit in old, familiar places.

But there are creatures of darkness in this house that I fear, and loathe. They wake me up on dark nights, dragging their shackling bones up and down the stairs and through the corridors. They make queer, uncanny noises, and often I hear swift-flying footsteps. On nights when the moon sheds pale lights over the room, they come—those stealthy things—and sit upon my feet; sit there silently, gazing at me, until I descry sardonic grins upon their faces, and shriek in terror. You all know them. The unimaginative call them “rats.” To some they come as emissaries of the Evil One, and as such they come to me.

The clock on the landing told the hour of midnight. Suddenly a sound struck the stillness and brought me, eager and trembling, to the casement. A chord of a guitar accompaniment came up from

the terrace, and a man's voice began in a low and mellow baritone:

Wie nahte mir der Schlummer,
Bevor ich ihn geseh'n
Ja, Liebe pflegt mit Kummer
Stets Hand in Hand zu geh'n!

My heart pounded. 'Twas that recitative so dear to me from "Der Freischütz" and in the soulful language that I loved. I stood in the shadow of the curtain, breathless. When had ever an opera so matchless a setting! The sleeping Jungle; the moon-flooded terrace and veranda; the great house wrapped in silence; the singer, unknown to me, yet whose voice throbbed with a passion that echoed strangely in my heart; and I at my window, hidden but trembling with I know not what blissful emotion.

The voice sang on:

Leise, leise, fromme Weise!
Schwing dich auf zum Sternen-kreise!
Lied, erschalle, feiernd walle
Mein Gebet zur Himmels-halle!

I leaned out into the moonlight and spoke,—softly, for there was much need for caution:

"Whoever you may be, I thank you, Sir Troubadour; I have never heard that recitative sung so sweetly."

He came up under the window, and his face showed plainly in the weird light. He was young and tall; his thin lips were firmly set, and back from the high forehead his hair fell away, glossy, black, and heavy; his eyes were luminous and eager, and held mine with an unaccountable fascination.

Some psychic mist-veil, as the trailing garment of a departed memory, lifted.

"Gogaphy!" I gasped, "Is it indeed you, or do I dream?"

"Forgive me," he said disregarding my question, "forgive me that I thrust myself thus upon you. All my life I have waited for you, listening for a sound of you, living over that happy summer when you waked in me the slumbering ambitions that since have guided me. It is true, then, that you, too, have not forgotten?"

His words fell low upon my ear; his eyes never left my face; but I looked off to the moon that sat, a round globe, upon a purple mountain-spire. I could not speak, but lived over, in tenfold ecstasy, those hours of unforgotten bliss. How splendidly handsome he was, and with what confident ease he stood before me! Gogaphy, I saw clearly, had well fulfilled his early hopes—he was much more than "Mayor of Mooretown."

"Have you no word for me?" he asked eagerly.

"I am filled with wonder," said I. "Tell me,

how is it that I have not seen you these weeks, and why do I now see you—thus?"

A window across the hall went up very cautiously. I put my hand to my lips, threw him a kiss, and retreated.

Then a black head popped in through the door from the little room back of mine:

"Its jes' like I tells you, Missis,—dey's dat per-nacious!"

But I threw myself upon the bed, while a new, glad joy sang in my heart; and over and over I repeated the lines of his serenade:

Before mine eyes beheld him,
Sleep never was my foe.
Ah! hand in hand with sorrow
Love e'er is wont to go!

There was no more creaking of boards—no fast-flying footsteps. But somewhere out in the beeches a bird answered sleepily:

"Sweet! Sweet!"

CHAPTER V

I RECEIVE A CALLER

Shortly after this, I had a visit from my nearest and friendliest neighbor, Mrs. Williams. I call her the Mole, for the simple reason that she burrows and in spite of the fact that she has large eyes and makes excellent use of them.

This morning she burrowed into my sanctum as I was taking my breakfast in bed. How she got in where only Dilly and Aunt Judy dare enter, would baffle the wits of all save the connoisseur of moles. In she was, however.

"Goodmornin'," she said, taking in at a glance every detail of the room in which things were having their own way.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, pouring a spoonful of hot coffee down my sleeve, "I thought you were Dilly—so glad to see you!" I extended a languid hand.

"Sick?" she asked, looking me through to the marrow. I told her I was, whereupon she removed her fascinator and proceeded to sit down in the morris chair.

"What's the mat—?" The interrogation was rudely interrupted. Puss, as developments showed, was tucked away under my day clothes

that should have been hanging on the clothes-tree, but were not. Not caring to be sandwiched alive, she rose to the occasion, and slapping the Mole's hand petulantly, leaped upon my breakfast platter. Upon this, for obvious reasons, I forgot my state of health, and sprang from the bed in search of a mop. Seizing a towel in the upper drawer of the dresser, I shook it out; and there issued from its folds that which froze me in my tracks,—not a mouse, but scattered instalments of playing cards. These were relics I was keeping, although there was now no one to wreak a fondness for them but the rats, who more than once had held secret, nightly carnival with them. Still, for the sake of past and unholy memories, I clung to them; and had foolishly hoped, by means of this towel, to hide them from the all-seeing eyes of Cousin Peggy.

Mrs. Williams stooped as if to bring chaos to order; then, seeming to consider this action unsafe without investigation, she turned to me, the first card in her hand.

"What are these things?" she inquired anxiously.

"Playing cards—that men gamble with, you know."

"Ugh! me know? Well I guess not!" She flung the unholy thing from her, which, fluttering airily over into the grate, was writhing in the flames ere I could reach it.

My visitor looked from the martyr to me significantly. How well I divined her thoughts! The little card had prophesied, in its awful fate, the final doom of all who have dealings with its kind.

"There, my deck is broken!" I cried in grief.

"Are they—yours?"

"Certainly they are mine, and I value them highly."

"And you—play!"

"When I have others to play with me. Will you kindly pick them up?—my back—"

"La, I hate to touch them things!" she grunted. Yet her desire to oblige overcame her repugnance, and she got them together somehow, handling them gingerly between thumb and forefinger.

The mop was unnecessary by this time, the white counterpane having performed that obligation for the coffee. So, not knowing what else to do, I sat down upon my feet on the bed.

"Folks say you've been here four weeks and no house-warmin' yet. They thought at first you'd be an addition to Mooretown, but you aint even paid no calls. What makes you so hold-offish?"

I implied from this that my doings had been well discussed in open meeting, and that I had been dubbed a rank failure socially. Also, besides being on the warpath daily in strife for popularity, rising early, and at even setting the carriage in direction for the next day's conquest—as some

have been known to do—I was expected to be a sort of sponge, soaked full of favors to be squeezed out at intervals for the benefit of other dry neighbor-sponges.

But to my neighbor I pleaded stress of work.

“What did you think of old Shakespeare?”

“Old who? I haven’t the honor of his acquaintance.”

“Why, Jim says—” she hesitated. “Jim says he seen you the other day git in that old man’s boat, that he had come across the river in, and row over the river and hide in the bushes. Jim says Shakespeare seen a time hunting his boat, an’ when he’d about stripped to swim, you came over—La, Miss Grigsby, that must have been a shock!”

Realizing the truth to be as nothing in face of such elasticity, I held my peace, pondering.

“Jim says Shakespeare gave you a gold locket—he seen it in your hand. Maybe you’re old friends.”

The Mole cast many anxious glances in the direction of the silent and dejected heap on the bed.

“We’re all afraid of old Shakespeare—he’s dafty. The children can’t be paid to cross to that mountain. Once some of the boys slipped up Hell Gate to spy on him, an’ not far up they heard a hollow voice comin’ from out the ground somewhere:

Fe, fi, fo, fum!
I smell boy meat, I get my gun!
Be he 'live, or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

"I bet they made tracks, don't you?" Her fat body shook at the idea, and I began to see that the old man must have some reason for his solitary life on the mountain.

"Why do you call him 'Shakespeare?' " I asked.

"'Cause he makes poetry at every turn; he even buys victuals in rhyme. Once he came in the store and says:

'Of the fruit of the cow and the fruit of the hen,
Reserve me this sum till I see thee again.'

What you think of that?" Again she shook, and again a conviction of his motive possessed me.

"How long has he lived on the mountain?"

"He came one snowy day last December with that poor, dumb girl of his, and took up his abode there like he had known the place from childhood. No one goes there but the minister. We all think that girl has some catchin' ailment." She lowered her voice to a whisper: "I think it 's leprosy."

I shuddered. Perhaps this was indeed true. Did she not shun me? I would ask the minister before I went to return the locket.

"What do you think of the minister?"

"Is he not away at Synod?"

"Nancy Moore said she seen him turn in here the other morning."

"Indeed! Perhaps he called on my cousin—I am often out of the house."

"Why, Mrs. Wilson, that he boards with, said at the Missionary Society yesterday, that she asked him what he thought of you, and he said he hadn't seen much of you, but from what he *had* seen he took you to be a rather surprising young woman."

"He judges from hearsay, doubtless," I replied, my face burning.

"He's an awfully nice preacher; trouble is he's young and good-looking, and the girls worry him to death. There's more young girls in that church now than there's been members for years—they've fair deserted the others—and as for the choir,—lands! its boomin'! with ten girls, and five young men who come to watch their sweethearts make eyes at the minister. There's that Skinner girl—got no more religion than a cat, dancin' and card playin' "—she looked at the culprits—"Sunday, she ups and joins the church. I 've got my opinion of a session what 's that graspin' for members! And Jane Collins—she spells it 'J-a-y-n-e,'—volunteered for organist,—what the session's been urgin' her to these three years. I'll just be bound some smooth-tongued, worldly hussy 'll nab him yet."

"I consider the life of a minister's wife far from inviting," I replied warmly, having somehow taken her remarks home with me.

"Why haven't you been to church?"

"I'm not very good, I fear."

"Oh, you must go to church! I've always gone and taken my babies from six weeks up."

"And do they—cry?" I asked aghast.

"Well, then I take them outdoors."

"And miss the sermon?"

"Oh, well, I don't remember much of that anyway. But I see the people, and get the news—that keeps one cheerful, and that 's half of Christianity."

"You are certainly right," I assured her. "But the news I hear oftener makes me cheerless."

"Yes, you must go to church," she repeated as a clincher to her argument. "Why, I haven't missed church for three years, and me with six children's faces, years, and necks to wash, and them to dress."

"Who washes their—bodies?"

"I do, of course, in summer; I 'd have them children's coffins to buy if I stripped them in winter."

"And they are healthy?"

"Yas'm, except colds—they 're always coughin' and sniffin', but that 's nothin.' "

"Are you opposed to the operation personally?"

"La, Miss Grigsby! I haven't bathed all over at once for years; it isn't decent."

(It may be well for me to add here that the Mole belongs to one of the Second Families.)

"You didn't say what's the matter with you."

(Would relief ever come!) "I fear it's the measles."

"Mercy! and me with six children!" The rest of her information was flung at me from outside the door, a cold draft fanning me the while. I have heard somewhere that drafts are not beneficial in measles.

"Say, Miss Grigsby, people say you oughtn't to live in this old hanted house; it isn't quite respectable—"

"Oh, don't let them worry; I adore ghosts. Why my grandfather's ghost walks here every night at midnight, and often about midday. We have gotten rather chummy in fact."

She looked at the clock,—it was ten minutes to twelve.

"Please don't hurry!" I exclaimed, springing to my feet, and half closing the door in my eagerness.

"I haven't a minute to stay—just run over to borrow a mess of flour—didn't have time to walk to the village."

"You'll find Aunt Judy below—good-bye!"

"I'll bring it back to-morrow," she called.

"Pray do not trouble yourself," I answered,

who would gladly have given her a barrellful had that sufficed to keep her at home a week.

As she passed down the terrace with her heaping two-gallon bucket, I,—who had so far recovered as to be able to stand by the window,—waved the flour a long adieu. That was the third bucketful in three weeks, with other things in proportion. And, as I had never seen any of them, nor their equivalents, again, so would I never see this one.

CHAPTER VI

UNCLE ISHAM SEES A "HANT"

No sooner had the Mole taken her departure than Aunt Judy entered, and began to busy herself about the room. When Aunt Judy does this, she has a grievance.

"What has Dilly done to you now, Auntie?" I asked, diving at once to the usual seat of her troubles. For between Aunt Judy and Dilly there existed what some term "an incompatibility of temperament."

"Miss Patsy, does you know de langwidge ob de heabenly choirs?"

"Mercy on us, Auntie! how should *I* know—I've never been there!"

"I jes' axed." Then, after a pause:

"Ise mighty pestered dis mornin', Missis, kayse Isham's bin dat onruly, jes like an ole' bline mule. He holes to it dat he hearn de angel Gabriel singin' las' night, an', do' de music wuz monstrous sweet, de wurdz was awdacious—'bout ez much signification ez de brayin' ob a donkey. Now Miss Patsy, dat shore done gimme a shock, kayse de Good Book meck considerable miration 'bout dey bein' right smart time gwine ter be put in on

singin' in glory; en if dey sings in Chinee, how I gwine jyne in de chorus? You knows, Miss, we'se gwine be singin' an' walkin' dem golden streets de whole endurin' years ob eternity. Dat gal, Dilly, 'lowed she aint carin'; jes' so dey gib us a little rag-time—Miss Patsy, speakin' o' city raisin'! dat gal's a fyar heathen!"

"Where did he hear Gabriel, Auntie?" I asked, smiling, as I thought of my German serenade.

"Dat aint de worstes, Missis," said she, dolefully. "Isham not alone hearn Gabriel, he seen 'im; an' arter seein' dat angel, he 'lows he gwine ter 'bandon de race fur glory."

"He must have had a vision, Auntie, I have thought angels to be most beautiful—what did he resemble?"

"I ain't got de figger ob speech to 'scribe 'im, Miss. You jes ax Isham. I got dis much from Isham's ravelin', howsomeber: dat angel warnt no beauty. I got meh 'spicions 'bout dat Gabriel, mehself; its rooten en grounded in me dat meh ole man seed a hant—you know dis house sho' 'nouf hanted, Miss Patsy?"

"What with—rats?"

Aunt Judy regarded me with pity.

"You sho' am funny, Miss. I means *hants*—real, libe hants. Aint I done seed 'em flyin' in thru de closed winders mos' any dark night? Aint I done hearn 'em draggin' chains an' coffin planks up de chimblys? Huh! you white folks

got mighty heap ob sense an' larning', but you suntiny am 'sprisin' bline an' deaf, 'pears ter me!"

"I would love dearly to see a hant, Auntie. What are they like?"

"De mostes hants I ebber seen wuz white wid white veils ober dey faces, an' angel sleeves an' trails floatin' in de air. Dey 's mostly moanin' an' seekin' fur sompen or nurr; an' Isham say dey is dem whar wuz de thievin' lot 'fore de ole boy cotch 'em, needer will dey git dey redemtshun till dey 'stores back ter de lawful owners all de chickens, melons, hambones, an' sich truck whar dey done meck off wid in dey moral life. Dey aint no hant neber tech me yit; but Susan Ann Bibbs—she whar married dat preacher dey call in he life, Judson Johnson—she sez a hant come flyin' in de close' winder de night arter he done ceasted, seized her an' sing out, anxiouslike: 'Susan Ann Johnson, has you seed any stray chickens round dis here lately?"

"But what pesters me, Miss Patsy, is dis: dey's bin hants foolin' round here lately, an' I don' know no one whar done any meanness in dis house. Howsomeber, dey's hants."

"It 's all foolishness!" I exclaimed warmly.

"Youse possibly right, Miss; but I kyarnt do nothin' wid dat ole man ob mine. He 'lows he gwine leave if he kyarnt prove de 'dentification o' dat angel, an'—an'—" here she began to heave and moan, and the situation to assume alarming

proportions. No hant would succeed in driving me from my new-found Elysium, but Uncle Isham's departure meant my departure.

"Do not worry, Auntie; no hant will ever get you or Uncle Isham, either."

"Don' know, Miss, don' know 'bout dat!" wailed the troubled one. "We aint got no shurance ob dat! we's monstrous triflin', no 'count niggers,—O Lord hab mercy!"

I patted the faithful shoulders, bearers of many burdens that should have been mine.

"If the Devil gets you, where will there be found a black enough place for me? The hants never visited you until I came, did they?"

"La Miss Patsy! Youse a white-souled angel now! If de bad man cotch you, I gwine sing out: 'Here, Mr. Debbil, pick up dis black rag whar you done tromp ober—ole black mammy gwine 'long ter fan meh lil'l Missis!'—course I aint gwine stan' by an' watch meh lady shrivelin' in de flames ob torment." That the African theology, with all its direful prognostications, effects so little in saving the necks of innocent pullets, is too wonderful for me.

That afternoon, as Uncle Isham carried the evening fire-wood, I called him to me.

"Uncle," I began, "I hear you saw an angel last night; tell me something about him."

The old man was plainly troubled. He fumbled with his brass chain nervously.

"For Gord, Miss Patsy! dat critter I seen want no angel, an' meh name's Isham Chandler Grigsby! 'Twas jes' so:

"'Bout midnight, I hearn a monstrous sweet strain o' music, dat recall ter mine an angel singin' in an unknown tongue. I jes' step outen de cabin ter git a sight o' de furrigner; when lo an' beholes! dar sneakin' round de house like an ole hound whar has yanked a hambone, come de oles' onneres' critter de Lord ebber made. I doubtin' right dar dat de Good Lord meck 'im nohow; leastways he done bin powerful knock up sence de job wuz complete. Reckon he hearn me puffin' kayse meh wind got ter leakin' kinder rapid; kayse he turn round, an' come shufflin' up to me, an'—you hyar me, Miss! dis nigger meck shore he done gone an' run up on de Ole Boy hisself. He had long white hyar, an' whiskers, an' humpty shoulder jints, an' beady eyes; he body wuz dat crumpled, an' de suporters lanky ez a starved heifer's, an' dat bent twill—'clar ter gracious! dat thing couldn't er pastured de heabenly sheep.

"He sez ter me, pointin' a skinny finger, 'Drap down in yo' tracks, nigger,—drap, I tells yer!' An' Miss Patsy, I drapped, I shorely did. An' moreober, I took de occashunableness ob dat seasonable position ter ax furgibness fur meh sins, whar I 'members wuz more in number den de hyar o' meh haid; I sez: 'O Lord, I is a poo' sinner, an' meh sins is numerous an' agreeable! O Lord,

sabe me from de debil an' he angels!' Wid dat, I aint got no funder; kayse dat spook kick me wid he ramshakle bender, an' knock me clean ober on meh face, an' sez: 'De debbil 's got you now, you ole black, los' sinner! you'd bettah be prayin' fur yo' young Missis—she'll need yo' ole black prayers.

"Wid dat mention ob meh Missis, de Lord visit me wid de shorn strength. I riz up, an' sez, step-pin' back to a 'spectable distance, sez I: 'You ole, snivelin' hant, you image an' subscription ob de debbil! you aint got me yit, is yer?' Den I run fur meh gun, an' when I done fin' dat gun in de dark an' git back, dat varmint war clean gone—mon, *he war gone!* I hankered arter stretchin' meh legs arter dat hant, but I rembers Judy's constant an' remittin' warnin' on de subject ob even-dropin', an' I 'frains from funder 'vestigations. Dats de sum o' meh 'sperience, Miss, an' dat aint no vishun needer."

This adventure troubled my mind no little, for I knew that a hant was not held in such respect by Uncle Isham as by Aunt Judy; then too, why had he mentioned me as in need of prayers?—a truth, no doubt?

"It's all very queer, Uncle, but there must be some explanaton. I take him to have been some tramp from the village."

"I jes' like ter know what dese unusen circumstances signify. You white folks has got

learnin' an' you knows how ter trap de Ole Boy; but Ise a poo' nigger whar goes by de signs an' de seasons, an' I sutiny is pestered, more speshully dat he speak contemptuous o' meh lil'l Missis."

"Never mind, Uncle, you go on with your chores, and I will study up a plan to trap him."

Still he lingered, shuffling his shoes uneasily over the soft carpet.

"Miss Patsy, I 'lowed mebbe a prayer-meeten mought peacefy de Lord an' skeer off de Debbil." Uncle Isham was a famous exhorter of the Baptist persuasion; and, barring a coon hunt, a prayer-meeting was his most cherished dissipation.

So I bade him pray as often as he wished, and to remember me in his petitions.

"Thanky, Miss, Gord bless yer, honey! An' Miss Patsy—"

"Well?"

"Ise powerful meddlin' an' presumin'—Judy 'low dat meh upsettin' sin—but I gwine pray de Good Lord dat he fine a man good 'nouf fur a prop fur meh lil'l lady—not ez I 'spects 'im ter fine one good 'nouf ter kiss yo' lil'l finger—I aint 'posin' all dat on de good Lord—but youse dat sweet an' temptin', and de Debbil's dat busy—" he turned wearily toward the door.

"Who could I have better than you and Auntie, Uncle?" said I, thinking of their constant and worshipful devotion.

"Youse all we got lef' an' we nourishes you ez

de las' rose ob dem happy ole summer times; but youse jes' like a lil'l white lamb 'mongst a passel o' black sheep; we'se poo' ole niggers, an' youse a lone sweet lily bud whar's wastin' its nonsense on de desert air."

"All right, you ask the Lord to find the incense-lover," I called after him, smiling.

"Dat I will, Miss, dat I will," he replied earnestly.

That night I watched until midnight, for the nights were brilliant. Yet, though the dogs barked furiously at one time, I saw no one, and dismissed the matter as the chimeric creation of an old negro's brain.

Early the next morning Dilly came to me with a box of roses—exquisite American Beauties, that could not have been bought in Mooretown, neither in all this ancient and honorable county.

"Oh, Dilly!" I exclaimed rapturously, "where did they come from?"

"You knows what I knows, Miss. Dey wuz layin' down on de poach wropped up in dis box—bin dar all night, I reckons."

Then she added as an afterthought, while she stood watching me hugging the beauties, and burying my burning face in their cool fragrance:

"Uncle Isham sez he seen dis same box at de post office yestiddy—the mail man brung it from de 'spress office in town. But he sez it bin handle since den, kayse dat box wuz wrop in yaller paper

an' writ on; dis 'n came jes so." She retired as far as the door, then turned to give full justice to the occasion, and words to my confusion:

"Looks like dey done set in wid dey pesterin' monstrous oncommon soon—comin' ter de country aint gwine shake 'em off! 'Deed it aint!"

There was no card attached, but my heart knew, and throbbed with that strange, new bliss.

CHAPTER VII

THE SERPENT ENTERS PARADISE

That evening after tea I stood out alone on the terrace under the stars. The moon, just rising over the jagged rim of the Blue Ridge, as yet had failed to dim their splendor. Jupiter sat robed in kingly apparel, as a monarch should be, high up in the blue dome of night; while Venus coyly hid herself low down behind a bold peak. I descried Orion, king of winter constellations, far out into the west, and the North Star gleaming in the train of the Ursa Minor. Baring my head reverently before the majesty of God's handiwork, I gazed upward with uncomprehending eyes, awed in the presence of such sublimity: stars, unnumbered, innumerable, each a mere speck in that vast empyrean of pure sky; planets, worlds on worlds, immeasurably great, bounding through space. What an earthworm was I! what a puny speck in so much vastness! A spark—yet immortal—blown off from the furnace of God's moulding-shop, to drift, fall, and rise again by the Breath of the Infinite into that perfection for which I yearningly strive—the Immortality of God.

Suddenly a slight sound drew me to earth—the snapping of a twig. Looking towards the step in

the stone wall, I saw that which seemed in keeping with the weird night—a goblinlike figure crouched upon the stoop, watching me.

It took no second glance to convince me that before me was the hant so accurately described by Uncle Isham. I knew, too,—and it sent a shiver to my heart—that we had met before, and that he it was who had first welcomed me home on the evening of my arrival at the station. I experienced a sensation of horror; my knees shook and my eyes seemed to play me false. I am blessed with steady nerves, but to have been brought thus rudely from celestial contemplation to face a possible habitué of regions quite the opposite, upset me no little. I stood my ground, however.

“Who are you?” I asked, swallowing hard at a persistent lump.

He sat motionless as the stone wall, and the answering silence oppressed me.

“Have you an errand, sir?” I asked again.

An uneasy screech-owl shivered out a wailing response.

“Can I serve you, stranger?”

Still no answer.

Etiquette demanded no more. I began backing toward the veranda. He rose, and with the stealthiness of a cat, crept up the terrace after me. I neared the step. He was now some ten yards from me. He came on—nearer. His face came out plainly to view, yellow and shriveled as an

ancient parchment, and in it the eyes glowed as two intense coals from under matted brows; they seemed to pierce to the very soul of me. A grin, uncanny as a madman's, distorted his features that in the ghostly light were already marrow-freezing.

Gaining the step, I managed to mount to one of the columns, against which I leaned for support; but I could get no further, for he was now close to me and his eyes held me by a snakelike fascination. Then he raised his crooked staff, and pointing at me, began:

"So this is his grandchild, Patsy, is it? Rich, beautiful, and dainty she is, this offspring of a craven! Dance on my pretty one, flirt on, and marry—marry, and your bridal couch becomes your bier! Childless you must die, and the line with you, that James Grigsby's name be a forgotten story! Look you well to it!"

Having delivered himself thus, with more I dare not pen, he laughed a shrill, diabolical laugh; then turning, glided down the terrace and out into the Jungle where he was soon lost in its intricate mazes.

I stood for I know not how long, motionless through extremity of terror, and stared wildly after the man, nightmare or archfiend, whatever he might be. It was as though I had been summoned from a life of freedom, of which I had

only begun to taste, to hear the reading of my death-warrant—for what, I knew not; and, overwhelmed by the fear of impending evil, I staggered back against the wall.

“Miss Patsy? Awe Miss Patsy?” called Dilly coming through the hall from the back of the house.

Recovering my poise on hearing her voice, I went over quickly to a white pillar, and stood, looking with unseeing eyes upward.

“Clar ter Gracious, Miss Patsy! you 's dat moon-struck! Honin' arter dem city dudes, I 'll be bound.”

I said nothing.

“Miss Patsy, aint you done heard de dawgs rantin' down in de ravine what runs up into de Jungle from de ribber?”

I had heard nothing.

“Well, deys some gem'mens down dyar whar's got a coon treed, an' dey sont dey nigger up hyar fur de ax. Uncle Isham 'lowed 'twant no two-legged coon gwine meck off wid no ax o' his'n, layin' de blame on de four-legged namesake. An' wid dat he put out wid dat ax hisself he ole ramshakle benders fyar screechin' wid de unwontin' hase.” Here she laughed immoderately.

“Call him back at once, Dilly! Have I not often said I will have no hunting on this place?”

“Gracious, Miss! kyant no message kotch dat man! He 's dat anxious fur a sight o' dat coon



he's fyar daft. De tree aint fur, I'll jest put meh foot in de parf arter dat gem'man."

"If you must go, then I'll go too—come!" said I, who would willingly at that moment have faced night, hunters, wild cats, panthers—anything, rather than remain another minute alone on that veranda.

"Land o' Canaan!" ejaculated Dilly. "My little Missis gwine down dyar 'mongst dem hyeners!"

Pulling my hooded cape about me, I had already made a good start. Dilly followed, stumbling and grumbling, and calling loudly to Topsy, who came not, his head at that moment being thoroughly wedged into the hole at the foundation of that tree upon whose high branches clung the frightened little raccoon.

The conjunction of the ravine with the river was but a few hundred yards from the Nunnery, and we soon came in sight of them. They had kindled a fire on the river bank, which cast a flickering glamour upon the hunters and the scene about them.

There were three gentlemen: Dr. Worthington, the village physician; Mr. Murray, the Presbyterian minister; and the old Sang Digger, at whose presence I marveled no little. Jack was there, employed for the hunt, and I understood at once Dilly's willingness to go, and that alone. And there, too, stood Uncle Isham chopping vig-

orously at a sycamore—one that I prized—while he cheered lustily to the yelping dogs.

We stood on the hillslope which way the tree would not fall, for it leaned over the river. Then I lifted up my voice and shrieked for Uncle Isham, shrieked until the surrounding forest answered, and from far across the river came back the echo. But no one heard me, for such is the fascination of a coon hunt for a man that the voice of a woman falls unheeded.

“Uncle Isham!” I yelled, drawing nearer.

A strange thing now happened, and most true to feminine nature; nevertheless I proceeded to astonish Dilly, likewise my own unaccountable self.

The panorama stretched before me was one entirely novel, weird, and witching: the looming background of forest and cliff, the latter gleaming bare and white in the moonlight; the river, of an inky blackness save where the leaping flames made tracks of silver, rippling, diminishing out into the sable shadows; the fantastic figures of the men and dogs glancing in and out among the tree-trunks, poking the fire, pointing, gesticulating,—appearing to me like eager participants in some savage witch dance, or, truer still, the death dance of some hapless victim.

“There he is—look, Dilly, look! He’s gone over into the leaning poplar! Uncle Isham—

quick!" All this in one breath to the stricken Dilly, who could but stammer:

"Fo' de Gracious, Miss Patsy! Is you gone—clean—crazy?"

I scrambled down the hillside, my hood back, my hair flying, the sleeping spirit of the savage and his wild joy in the chase awakening within me. I seized Uncle Isham's arm.

"Look, Uncle, he 'll get away! he 's gone down that old tree leaning toward the water! Sic, Dandy—Topsy! Pshaw!"

As I spoke, the raccoon, realizing his extremity, and grasping his last hope, had crept in the shadow (made more sombre by the fire beneath) onto the poplar, a single arm of which pressed the arm of its neighbor, the sycamore, affectionately. Once on this tree, whose roots were deeply imbedded in the river bank, the little creature glided silently, watchfully downward; and, as I uttered the exclamation "pshaw," had plunged headlong into the water, which closed over him.

The men stood stupidly about, hatless, coatless, speechless, glaring at me. The doctor, being the first to recover, reached for his coat, donned it, and made Dilly the stateliest of bows. Mr. Murray's expression seemed entirely to justify his former verdict as to my being a surprising young woman; he put on his hat, then, taking it off, offered me a seat on a stump. The Sang Digger went quickly to stand in the shadow, whence he

watched me. His eyes never left my face; and this worried me, for they seemed strangely familiar though I had seen the man but once.

Uncle Isham and the dogs alone gave heed to the business at hand.

"Dat critter 's done gone now sartin; jes let a coon tech de water an' dey aint no dawgs gwine cotch 'im!" groaned the old man. "Jack—awe Jack?"

"Yes seh," answered Jack from somewhere back in the shadows.

"Dilly, sen' dat nigger hyar, gal."

Jack came.

"Aint you done seed dat coon slippin' down dat tree, you idyet!"

"I seen a mighty sprightly-lookin' coon slippin' down dat bank dar, Mister Isham, I sutiny did," chuckled Jack.

"You imperdent, greasy-faced nigger! I 'll teach yer ter call a lady a coon!" came out from the shadows along with a sizable pebble that took the offending Jack plump on his ear.

"No offense, lady—no offense," Jack hastened to explain, rubbing the injured member vigorously.

Silence from out the darkness.

"You sutiny am surprisin' in yo' methods ob attack, lady,—meanin' no offense."

Deeper silence.

"Dat coon shore done slip off slick," lamented Uncle Isham.

"We 'll get him yet, Uncle," encouraged the minister.

"Git 'im! den you hab ter 'merse yo'self, Marse Murray! Coons takes ter water jes ez natchel ez a woman ter sass; de dawgs done los' de scent, an' dat coon kin hole he bref same ez a kinkin' baby. Dunno whyfur de good Lord meck wimmen folks sich oncountable, interferin', ag-gervatin' critters nohow!" He was plainly distressed.

Seeing the raccoon was gone, and now that the excitement had subsided, I contemplated my situation, and found no pleasure therein.

"Come, Uncle Isham," said I. "I came for you. Have you not heard me say repeatedly that I wish no hunting on my lands? I am truly glad that the little creature escaped."

"Fo' de Lawd! Who dat I done hearn say, 'sic 'em, cotch 'im,' dis here lately."

"Oh! I was urging the little fellow; you saw how he heeded me," I replied laughing.

"You knows, Missis,—you knows," he grunted.

"Come, Dilly," said I, turning to mount the hill.

Just then Uncle Isham, in order to hasten its death, poked the fire vigorously. It flamed up as a torch, flooding the scene with light, even across the river, where the rocks of Hell Gate gleamed in the uncertain glow. I turned to look again: and there across the flame-tracked water I caught

the glimpse of a face—the Sang Digger's daughter's. It showed with a deathly pallor; the eyes glittered, and a look of unutterable woe radiated from their depths. They were riveted on my face.

I stood rooted to the spot, gazing with wide-eyed horror across the river, and trying, from that distance, and in the flickering light, to recall that face. Then the Sang Digger, whom I heard even at this moment utter a smothered exclamation, dashed an armful of damp leaves and earth upon the fire, and there came over the scene a black darkness.

As I now began groping my way up the slope, a swift step overtook me.

"May I assist you, Miss Grigsby?"

I drew back, my face burning, for it was the minister.

"Have I met— this is Mr.—?"

"This is Mr. Book-Agent," he replied wickedly, divining the cause of my confusion.

"Miss Grigsby has long ago retired, Mr. Book-Agent; your walk will be in vain."

"But I am also a picture man, and have at present two that may interest even you."

"I shall be charmed."

"The first has for its setting the library of an old Virginia mansion. On two sides are rows of books behind glass doors. A piano stands in one corner, and scattered about is much good music. A man, standing over at the window by the book-

cases, holds in his hand a large, brown volume at which he is not looking. On a bearskin rug before the blazing grate stands a—”

“Your taste in art is far from classic; and it is a source of sorrow to us country bumpkins that you traveling agents inflict such outlandish specimens of your trade on us who—”

“Permit me to finish ere you pronounce judgment: “—on the rug stands a girl in unfestive attire, her skirts bedraggled, her hair falling in rings over her shoulders, her face gloriously—”

“Dilly,” I called anxiously, looking back through the darkness, “are you coming with Uncle Isham?”

“Ise followin’ in yo’ footsteps, Missis,” she called from somewhere back of me. Then there came the sound of whispering and suppressed giggling, and I, understanding, said no more.

“I hold in my heart the memory of that—”

“Your picture does not interest me in the least,” I interrupted. “Having heard often from a good neighbor of the ‘nice’ sermons she hears from the Presbyterian pulpit, I judge that you are interested in other topics than pictures. Let us discuss the theory of evolution, versus spiritual initiative.”

“I fail to understand you.”

“For instance, a man like Dante, whose genius at that early day of civilization was such that we can now but stand and wonder,—from what did he draw his power? From the spirit of the age in

which he lived, or from his wonderful, inherent genius?"

"I care not to discuss such subjects with you," replied the huffed clergyman.

"And if there be evolution in the spiritual life, would we not rise in time to a point beyond which there would be nothing to acquire—beyond the bound of that moral freedom which is the keynote of our strivings?"

"Am I to have no rest from dogma, even in the presence of such a woman as you?"

My head went up.

"I see you bear the regulation masculine idea of our sex."

"And what do you conceive that idea to be?"

"That woman is well enough in her place at home; she may even do for the setting of a painting, and to banter light and giddy speech with. But a woman with dogma or other weighty matters is a woman out of her sphere."

"Exactly," he replied. "Perhaps you do not know just how weighty and cumbersome these dogmas are. What do you know of Spiritual Initiative and Natural Evolution?"

"Less than nothing," I confessed, fearing lest he catechize me.

"Where did you get the phrases?"

"From an article in the 'London Review'."

"Do you remember all of it?"

"Mercy, no. I simply got the idea."

"There, you have answered yourself," he said. "Women get, as a rule, no further than the idea in these matters, and these ideas they often get sadly tangled. Why did you not thoroughly digest that article?"

"I call it hardtack."

"And what is hardtack but the compulsory food of soldiers on the field of battle? You might taste of it once in order to flaunt the feat to other uninitiated palates, but what of it for daily fare?"

"I shall discuss dogma no more with you, sir. But perhaps you will answer me this: why is it that the altruistic spirit of our times, which causes one to forget himself in agonizing labor of love for his fellow-man, does not extend its service to the dumb friends about us? Why does man preach the largeness of life, its beauty and its fullness of joy, and then, without an inner qualm, proceed to blow the brains from some innocent wild-wood creature in which the Creator has planted so keen a delight in life?"

"Death to them is utter oblivion; and being such, come it soon or late, what matter? They have no need of time for repentance, no salvation to work out in fear and trembling."

"Then this life is their only hope of happiness, and why cut it off before their songs are all sung, their joys numbered? How much they need a defender in this unequal strife where brute force rides king, be it found in man or beast!"

"Beasts were made for man," he argued.

"So you say was 'woman made for man'," I retorted. "Because of this domination of the physical did man once sit on the summit of an ancient civilization, while woman, his equal, because of her fragility was forced to grovel a slave at his feet. She has just now risen to throw off that meek submissiveness to her liege, a submissiveness gotten not of the Lord, but by inheritance transmitted from her groveling foremothers."

"In my humble observation," replied the minister smiling, "woman has always looked to her defense as effectively as did that little raccoon to-night. It took to the water—she takes to her wits, achieving by wily strategem in an hour what man's brute strength would never accomplish, strove he a century."

We had now reached the Nunnery, lying grim and solitary in the light of the moon, while a deathly stillness brooded over it. Could I enter that house into which perhaps that demon had now crept by some hellish trick to frighten me?

I put my hand to the knob, then drew back shuddering. A sense of insufferable gloom overwhelmed me; it was so dark, so still within!

"Let us sit here," I said quickly, turning to the step.

Mr. Murray must have divined that all was not right. He sat down beside me and looked searchingly into my face.

"Miss Grigsby," he said at length, "what folly possessed you to flit into this wilderness as a dove into exile—mateless?"

"I but fled from a wilderness of people into a wilderness of trees; more congenial to the habits of a dove, think you not?"

"Will they protect you from harm?"

"They will not murder me, nor steal my chattels. They are, besides, most delightful neighbors. They listen solemnly for hours while I talk of myself; neither do they talk of themselves, expecting me to be interested, and say unkind things of me afterwards."

"It is folly! It must not be—it cannot be!"

"But it *is*, nevertheless."

"You are too young, too—"

"Listen—there go the dogs! another innocent victim!"

"And I must join them,—good night."

"After all I have said?"

"After all you have said."

"Please don't! please, for my sake!" I held out my hand imploringly.

"Say that again, and I will swear eternal fidelity to mice, snakes, and mosquitoes," he replied laughing, and coming to my side.

"I make not my demands so comprehensive; but come inside; we will have tea, and I have a favor to ask of you." The dogs were forgotten.

"Will you pilot me to the hut of the Sang Digger?" I asked over our cups.

Mr. Murray started.

"Do you know him?" he asked quickly and struggling to conceal his agitation.

"I have but seen him. It is his daughter I would visit, for I fear she needs a woman's care. Did you not see her to-night across the river? She looks ill."

"She would not see you—I am sure of that."

"Why? she has no contagious malady, else you would not visit there yourself."

He was silent.

"Can I depend on you for guidance?" I persisted.

"Will you take my advice, Miss Grigsby?"

"I will consider it."

"Do not cross to that mountain."

"Have you good reasons?"

"I have."

"May I know them?"

"The villagers fear them—they might think you in league."

"Then why do *you* go?"

"God's minister goes where he is needed—he must, in duty bound."

"Then will I go, in duty bound; I care not a fig for the villagers."

"It is no place for you, believe me; the mountain is wild, the way difficult."

"Mr. Murray," I asked, looking him in the face, "do you know this old man well?"

"I have met him often, and, as you seem to know, have visited him."

"Is he just as—*old* as one would suppose?"

He could ill conceal a start of surprise.

"I do not like this useless catechizing," he answered, rather testily. "What should I know of the man but that he follows his trade quietly, and is at no odds with the villagers."

"Then I will go to her myself."

He looked at me quietly, though his eyes pleaded. I even thought that he suffered. Perhaps my willfulness grieved him.

"Please—please!" I pleaded.

"Hush!" he cried; and then I saw that in his eyes which made further entreaty impossible, and spoke no more of that which lay so heavy on my heart.

CHAPTER VIII

OPOSSUM VARIATIONS

My Cousin Peggy Jane, now that the labor of moving was over, could scarcely endure the solitude of this "heathenish wilderness," as she dubbed my retreat. And no wonder, for she does so love to talk. In the city, she would hang over the back fence for hours at a time exchanging confidences with congenial neighbors. But here the back-fence neighbors are pigs and chickens; and since I am always out of doors, and Aunt Judy and Dilly taciturn to intruders—they consider her an intruder,—her life here is not worth living.

She is of that type, well known to most women, from whom, in the matter of rivalry, we have nothing to fear. This I find so comfortable that I willingly accept withal a tongue of whip-cord properties; also an inordinate, insatiable curiosity. There can be no combination lock of skeleton closet or heart's treasure-chest so intricate as to baffle her persevering efforts at prying. She may be thirty-five or fifty—there is none to tell. Her face is hatchet-shaped, eagle-beaked; her eyes, small, far in-set, and of an uncomfortable keenness; while her mouth, with its lines and projecting teeth, is not what I call kissable. She is tall, but

not "willowy"; and I, to whom my diminutiveness has always been a thorn in the flesh, do now experience at times a sense of gratitude to the Powers that made me as I am.

Then she is so indefatigably busy with her fingers that I suffer the remorse of a criminal—in her presence—when I sit quietly beside my work, by no means afraid of it, my hands behind my head, my feet high on the fender, my eyes gazing into the fire, while my energetic brain employs itself in finishing off the steeple of an elaborate air-castle.

The night after my encounter with the goblin was passed in tossing, and stopping my ears to those diabolical curses, that, borne on every breath of the night wind, seemed to screech at me through the watches. When morning came, Cousin Peggy entered the room, and looking at me keenly, asked if I rested well during the night. This was not her wont, and her tone of voice seemed significant. But she asked no more and backed out, to await the coming of a cousin or a good neighbor—and she had not long to wait.

Having risen and finished a careful toilet, I chanced to look out of the window and saw that which precipitated me back into bed with astounding alacrity—the approach of a cousin, and that cousin a chum of Cousin Peggy's and sharer of her confidences.

Soon Dilly's step without sounded the knell of doom. She had assisted at my toilet, and brought me tea only a moment before; and I marveled at the nice discernment that caused her to delay her entrance,—a thing unusual with Dilly.

"Awe Miss Patsy," she called.

No answer.

"Miss Patsy!" came again from somewhere near the keyhole.

"What, Dilly?" I groaned from under the counterpane.

"Is you worser?" she asked, poking her head in a small crack.

"My head—my head!" It really did feel far from its best.

"Miss Rachel's come ter call, Miss."

"For pity's sake, tell her I'm in bed, will you?"

"Yass'm," answered Dilly, stooping to remove a boot that protruded from the white cover. Then, as I continued to moan in agony:

"Whar's yo' haid, Miss? I'll jes rub out some o' dat misery."

"Go tell Cousin Peggy Miss Rachel is here."

Dilly grunted. "She got Miss Rachel fyar wound up dis minute narratin' de detailment o' dat coon hunt las' night. I hearn her say you meck a degagement wid Marse Murray fur dat hunt, an' guess 'twont be long 'fore you'll be payin' candescent meetins ter dat old Sang man on Hell Gate. Dat lady's a juggler, Miss! kayse I

aint seen no empty bucket 'fore what leaked out so rambunctous what aint neber bin poured in it—'deed I aint."

That afternoon, as I sat toasting my toes by the sitting-room grate, feeling better though unable to work, Cousin Peggy toiled in the twilight over an elaborate tray cloth of Mount Mellick. Regarding all such eye-extinguishing operations as contrivances of His Majesty whose work it is to devise us mischief, I expressed some such opinion to my cousin. She forthwith suggested that I cultivate a more intimate acquaintance with his Lordship,—meaning, with his works, I trust; whereupon I mentioned the awful sin of proselyting, and Cousin Peggy left the room.

Suddenly the knocker sounded, and Dilly soon appeared bearing a silver tray and grinning broadly. On lifting a napkin, I discovered what looked to be the corpse of a cat, roasted to a delicious brown, and fenced about by smoking sweet potatoes.

"Good Gracious, Dilly!" I gasped. "What on earth?"

"Taint nothin' on earth, Missis; jes' a possum restin' on a bed o' sweet taters."

"Now I jes' wonders who got de imperdence ter sen' a lady dis mess!" she soliloquized, as she watched me detach a small card from the creature's paw. "Back yonder 't was flowers an' 'fec-

tions; now it 's gwine be possum an' taters—'clar ter gracious!'

"Who dat say 'possum'?" Uncle Isham stood in the doorway, loaded down with firewood.

"You sutiny aint countin' on dis possum gettin' standin' room longside o' dat rabbit pie, is you, Uncle?" grunted Dilly. "Miss Patsy, de possibil'ties o' dat man's eatin' 'commodations 'stounds me; dey jes' like dem big 'partment houses!"

"Now, Uncle, have you really killed another rabbit after what I told you?"

"I aint mention rabbit, Miss."

"Den I 'll mention de dimenshuns o' dat pie what 's bakin' in de Missis' oven, an' scentin' up dat kitchen twill dat man kyarnt tar hissself off ter feed de hosses," Dilly was quick to interject.

"I aint smelled no rabbit pie, Missis, dat 's de Lord's truf! I aint knowd dese 'partments too schrouged fur possum an' taters, howsomeber," chuckled the old man.

"Dis possum aint b'long ter no nigger, nohow; it 's fur de little Missis."

"Fo' de Lawd! who sont Miss Patsy any sich kitchen trash?" exclaimed Uncle Isham, shuffling out.

"Who brought it, Dilly?" I ventured.

"I 'll jes' step out an' ax 'im who he is," she replied, leaving the room. A colored man, I now learned, had been waiting patiently at the door.

"Take him to the kitchen, Dilly," I called.

She paused in the hallway, looking him over.

"Good Lands! take dat clodhopper into my kitchen? No seh! Look at dem feet!" Then she addressed the man at the door:

"Who sont dat mess hyar, nohow, nigger?"

"Whee! hyar dat black gal callin' possum meat 'mess'. Whar you from, lady?"

"Taint takin' no X ray ter tell whar *you* from, shore!"

"What you signify by 'X ray'?"

"Whar you bin livin', coon? Youse one o' dese hyar green spring vege'bles—a regular ignor-mus."

"Does you mean ter misuse de word 'ignor-ramer'?"

"I means what I means, seh!"

"Hi, youse uppish! city, eh?"

"Leastways Ise no up-country trash—don't know nothin'!"

"Is you 'quainted wid we-all, Miss? Wese de top o' de pot."

"I takes notice de grease rises."

"Wese de cream o' Mooretown sassiety."

"De onliest black cow what I knows is de Holstein; an' de cream from dat cow is dat thin twill kyarnt whitewash a nigger's lip—mighty poo' cream, mighty!" I could tell from Dilly's tone that her chin was tilted to a considerable angle.

"Shet yo' imperdent mouf, gal!" said the cream of Mooretown's Holsteins.

"I aint hearn you say who sont dat mess ter meh little Missis."

"Is you yo' lady's keeper?"

"Ise got a mighty big rabbit pie cookin' out in de kitchen an'—"

"Heish, gal! dat ole sadger gimme a dollar ter fetch dat critter hyar an' not mention de sender."

"De secrets what's intrusten to dese years o' mine is good ez buried in de grabe o' death; dey petrifies in dyar."

"Dey tells me de dead rises."

"Dilly," I called, feeling that this might never end, "here, give this tray to your friend."

"No friend o' mine, Miss," she replied indignantly, and hastening back to the door, where, after much scuffling, giggling, and squealing, punctuated by phrases such as "Quit, nigger!" "Youse dat fresh!" and their like, the door slammed, and she walked demurely back into the sitting-room.

"Did you know him, Dilly?" I asked with some show of interest.

"No, Miss. I don't sot meh eyeballs on no sech trash ez dat coon. Dey want no refinery 'bout dat man,—face jes' ez black an' shiny ez Risin'-sun stove polish—an' shoes!—dey was dese hyar number no mores, Miss! An' dat fool had de awda-ciousness ter ring yo' front do' bell!"

"I thought I heard him kiss you,—I heard something."

"You heard me givin' im some of dis hyar inside fis' o' mine—whar I gwine dispose o' dis carcass?"

"On the dinner table, of course."

"You shorely aint gwine eat possum meat, Missis!"

"I surely am—take it away."

A little later, Aunt Judy poked her grizzled head in at the door:

"Miss Patsy, dat possum aint fitten to eat."

"Why?"

"Takes a nigger to cook possum."

"Perhaps a negro did cook it."

"You kyarnt fool me, Miss. I kin tell by de way dat possum res' on he bed o' taters dat he ole nuss aint put 'im ter sleep; he res' so onnatchel an' oncomforable like. De white folks kin cook dem things dey calls 'ah-la-francy', but when it comes ter possum,—Good Lawd!"

When Cousin Peggy and I sat down to dinner that night, the opossum reposed comfortably enough, to my unseeing eye, on its potato bed before me. Cousin Peggy managed to pour the coffee, but she refused meat: she was ill. In the inevitable course of events that brings to all their just deserts, it had now come turn for Cousin Peggy's head to ache; and, pleading this much-imposed-upon malady as excuse, she left the table.

I ate a bit of the greasy thing. It was not good. It tasted a good cross between a pig and a porcupine, or something equally unknown to me.

I rang the bell.

"Dilly, give this thing to Topsy."

"Yass'm," she answered, bearing the unfortunate creature to the kitchen.

At nine o'clock Topsy came whining to me for his supper. He also must have apartment-house accommodations.

And as for me, here was somewhat else to trouble me: although it was doubtless taken on my estate last night, why should the old Sang Digger of Hell Gate send me an opossum—and on a silver tray?

CHAPTER IX

MOORETOWN'S SOCIAL CENTER

The next day, Sunday, dawned clear. A halo of mist encircled the mountain summits; and up over them, piercing the mist veil with his shafts of resistless splendor, rode the sun.

That calm, peculiar to the country Sabbath, pervaded the air. Over all nature rested a holy hush, a reverent waiting to do homage to Him whose day it was. Jed crowed lustily once, not yet knowing the scruples of his Presbyterian neighbor-cocks; then, not encouraged by any response, he uttered a subdued quaver and joined in the common silence.

There was no shouting of boys about the farm, no calling of cows. The dogs lay about in the sun, refraining, because of well-enforced principle, to indulge in their wonted bunny chases. A solitary crow cawed from the lower meadow. His band was doubtless in attendance upon some religious service over in the pine forest across the river. Their discordant voices could be heard, wafted hitherward on the breeze; and, judging from the noise they made, it must have been a revival with many sinners making loud confession; for crows are renowned reprobates. A chicken

hawk, crafty marauder that he is, sat upon an old dead tree near the barnyard. He, as many another sinner, was wont thus to impose upon this day of rest, the laws that be, and Uncle Isham's deep-seated convictions.

I went to church that day, Mrs. Williams doubtless would say, either because she so induced me, or because of the minister. But how could these people understand that I, a degenerate in their eyes, felt so much in these days the need of a strength given to those of mine who had worshiped here, and that I had failed to find elsewhere! And, as I turned my face upward to the sacred shrine of my fathers, that stood, a landmark, upon the brow of the hill, my heart swelled for the first time with gratitude for the blessing of a pious ancestry.

On this spot, in a ruder building perhaps in the earlier days, those sturdy Scotch-Irish dissenters from the established Church had worshiped since the year 1750. Here had knelt men and women whose moral vigor has seldom, if ever, been equaled, finding by communion with their God the secret of that nerve force that made of them the backbone of a mighty nation. From overseas single-handed they had come, goaded beyond endurance by the red tyranny of kings and the fetters of religious servitude. With the Bible their guide, they had plunged fearless into an impenetrable wilderness, fording rivers, scaling moun-

tain-slopes, and threading the mazes of primeval forest that, or ever night came on, resounded to the scream of the panther, or the blood-curdling yell of the savage. With the axe, their sole implement, they essayed to carve from the forest log-cabins, rude, perhaps, but by no means despicable for warmth and comfort. With their rifles they feared not to look their blood-thirsty foes fearlessly in the face; while I, their unworthy descendant, sit secure and idle under my vine and fig-tree, mine because of their dauntless and untiring efforts. I climb the same hillslope up which you, my worthy foremothers, toiled in bonnet and homespun; I in lonely, dissatisfied ease; you, in simple contentment and leading your numerous progeny; I dead in spiritual inertia; you, with eager footsteps and souls yearning for the blessings vouchsafed the faithful. The same sun shed on you his generous radiance. The everlasting hills stood then as now they stand, and will, when these bones of mine shall have mingled their dust with yours,—will ever stand,—sentinels of the Ages.

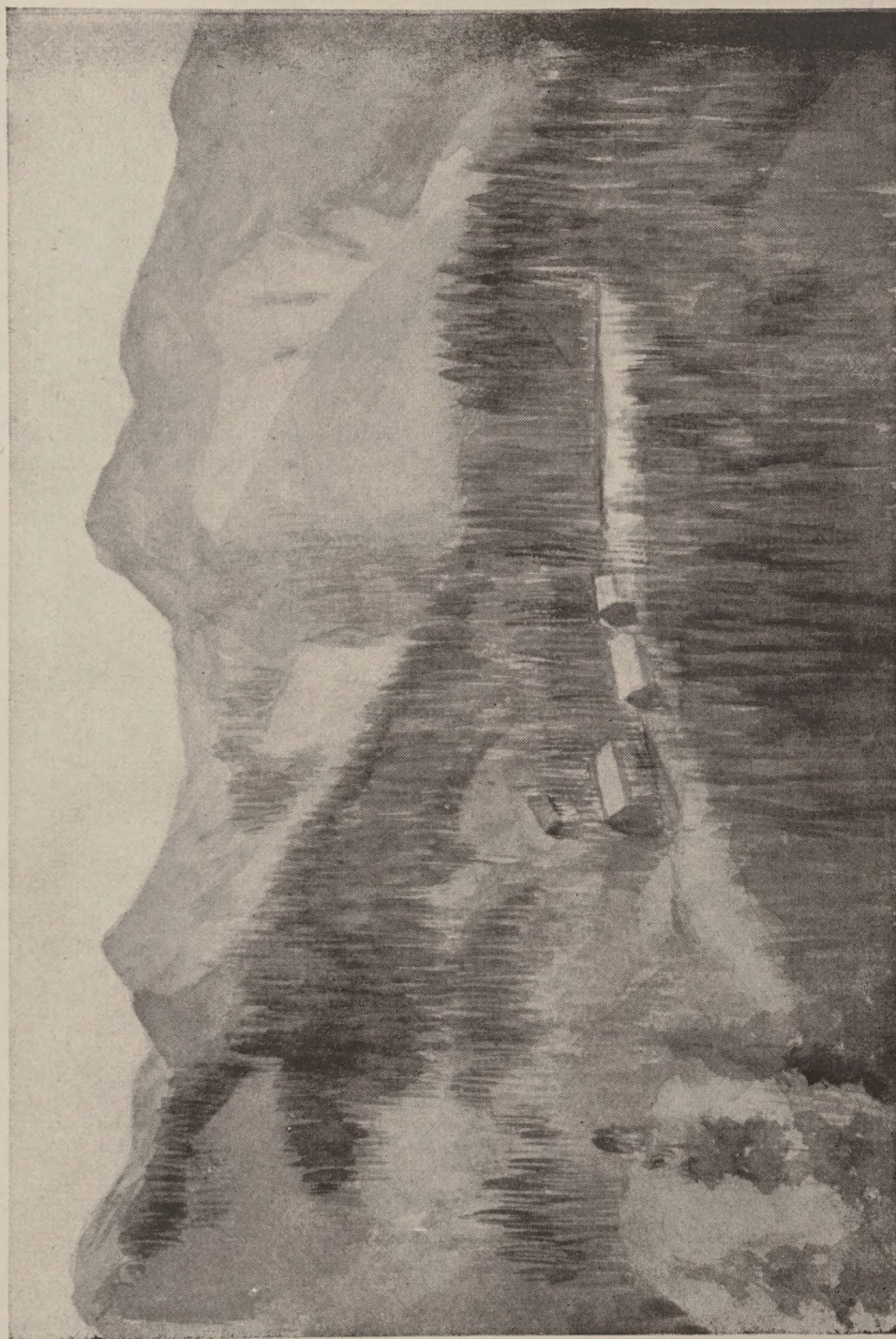
Poor, tired mothers! Long since have you laid your heads to rest here in the soft lap that nourished you. And you, poor feet that never stopped, and hands that never rested! your rest has been long and quiet enough in that narrow, peaceful bed. Long since have you entered that more excellent heritage secured to you through those years of

conflict; long since has faith been changed to sight, your tears to the joys of morning. And, though many summers have passed over your bed, and many snows enshrouded you, your name is more than a memory. There comes down from you to me through the years a subtle aroma, as of dead rose-leaves preserving their fragrance pressed between the multiplying leaves of time's heavy volume. And this morning, if there be any good in me, any discontent of a useless life, any striving for better, 't is to you I turn in gratitude for the deathless benefaction.

As Cousin Peggy Jane and I approached the church, a sight unfamiliar to me presented itself.

Groups of men of all ages were scattered about the entrance. The older ones, squatting about the roots of a large oak, chewed tobacco and discussed various crop results and the coming election. The young men and boys were distributed about, upon the church steps, around the doorway, or perched themselves in fowl-like precision upon the plank fence that surrounded the church. These junior members of the sex that never gossips, discussed the undoubted or doubtful charms of the girls, who, climbing the slope, fluttered by with unseeing eyes and unhearing ears into the church.

As I, poor victim, drew nigh to run the dreaded gauntlet, where a merciless fire of criticism and jokes was wont to be hurled against unoffending



“Sentinels of the ages.”

backs, a silence as of death pervaded the assembled host. I dared not raise my eyes; but felt my cheeks go burning at the consciousness of many critical eyes upon me, for I was a stranger. I confess here that never in my previous experiences, when it had fallen to me to undergo the eye of criticism, had I suffered as I now did; into this moment of agony could have been squeezed the sum total of all past embarrassments. As I stumbled awkwardly into the vestibule, my ear caught the first blast of the oncoming tempest:

"Whew!" came from under the oak-tree.

"Gee Whiz!" was wafted from the fowl roost.

Then the church door shut out the sound of recovered speech and suppressed chuckling.

As I passed up the aisle, bonnets and hats of every size, shape, and hue turned nimbly on well oiled pivots; there were nudges and whisperings. But I noted also with joy that sweet smiles greeted me from under trim bonnets, and graceful plumes nodded friendly welcome.

I wore a tailored gown of garnet broadcloth, with vest of cream, and a turban whose rosettes shaded from garnet to that delicate tint of rose that blends so charmingly with the former—my favorite combination in dress. One remark only reached my ear as I passed to my seat. It came from a young miss in green, with cerise ribbons for decoration, while upon her head wobbled a huge, scarlet hat:

"Look, would you,—red and pink! Horrors!"

This remark went further than the whole tempest without to ruffle me.

The minister was already behind the desk, and a vigorous scuffling among hymn-books and semi-audible whispers from the direction of the choir, announced labor begun in that quarter. The choir consisted of:—an organist and soprano combined, who screamed in agony and accompanied her vocal and pedal exertions with excruciating distortions of countenance; an aged tenor, who, with his "American Tune Book," conducted a private vocal exhibition of his own,—his time, rhythm, and melody agreeing in no particular with the time, rhythm, and melody of the hymn in question; two young men who sang something, I could not tell what,—and many girls.

The doxology over, the minister's voice was raised on the waiting stillness for the invocation, a voice, once heard, never to be forgotten; deep, full, magnetic, it swelled through the church, and fell upon my ear as the chiming of hidden melody. Then, with some unaccountable grip on the hearts of his hearers, he led them by simple, unostentatious discourse to feed in green pastures.

I do not remember the text—I never do; but I remember well, and always will, many things he said. Often have I thought since, that, knowing my need, Mr. Murray had preached that sermon to me.

He spoke of the unanchored soul, floundering about and seeking, amid the shoals of skepticism and the hidden rocks of doubt, a haven for his bark. Trusting to no pilot, without knowledge, without the beacon light-house of faith, all through the night and the tempest-tossing,—the morning finds the fragments of his vessel lying upon the bleak death-rocks, and the man—where is he? Thus we grope, that immortal, insatiable part of us, that inmost “me” of our beings, which, by its yearnings, proclaims our kinship to the Infinite. How we strive in our own strength to touch the intangible! How we long for glimpses into the Unknown Beyond, for some clearer revelation from that Divine Source whence spring our assurances of Immortality!

But why should we grope, seeking unguided our haven? For every haven there is a pilot; for every rock of disaster, a clear-shining beacon. Why flounder amid quicksands of Doubt, that, or ever comes the night, will engulf us? Why struggle amid the storm and stress of spiritual unrest? Why, needing a guide, do we turn to our own proud spirits, and hide our silly selves from the Hand outstretched to guide us? O eyes, blinded by infirmity, look! The Hand is there, outstretched to you, who grope blindly through the mists.

At the close of the service Mr. Murray came at once to me, and, taking my hand in a firm grip, ex-

pressed pleasure at seeing me in church. Then he passed on down the aisle, taking the hands of other women, married and unmarried, in the same firm grip, and expressing just as much pleasure at seeing them. He patted the heads of children, pinched the cheeks of many infants, or chucked them under their wee dabs of chins, thus achieving much in the way of popularity. He accepted no less than three invitations to "all days" for the coming week; then he passed on out to where the pillars and sleepers of the church had again phalanxed themselves, having been propelled from the edifice by the "amen" of the benediction,—for the world as though it were the cannon's fuse and they the charge of small shot.

"Isn't he lovely!" exclaimed the Mole with her three smallest clinging to her skirts.

"Just too nice!" agreed Mrs. Harman, widowed sister of Dr. Worthington, and his housekeeper (she has a blooming daughter of eighteen, the recognized age of highest value in the matrimonial market of Mooretown).

"How do you like him?" a mother asked me.

"I didn't know you 'd met him," said another, her tones bristling with interrogation.

"Why, I thought he was at your house Friday night!" Mrs. Williams exploded into my dumfounded ear.

"He was at *my* house Friday night," said Mrs. Harman exultantly. Friday night?—that was

the night of the coon hunt when the eleven o'clock chime of the clock had roused him from the care-beguiling depths of my library arm-chair. He must have called by for the doctor. But how did Mrs. Williams find this out?

I now observed that I was the only single woman in the church, barring a few aged spinsters and widows. The rest had followed hard upon the steps of the minister; and I, too, had been outside could I have got there. As it was, I wedged my difficult way along between two sizable matrons, whose infants in arms seemed to me to display unnecessary interest in the rosettes of my turban. However, through my deliberate egress I learned this important bit of news: these two infants were to be baptized at preparatory service next Saturday afternoon by the minister, and would I not like to come and witness the performance?

Mr. Murray hastened to join me as I turned down the hill.

"How your people do love you!" said I, smiling into his face.

"Do I detect sarcasm in that?" he replied, smiling also.

"I have heard nothing but 'Mr. Murray' since my arrival. Did you know that Mrs. Williams set a hen in a box behind her kitchen stove last week in order that she might be the first to offer you spring chicken?"

"Have you set a hen for me?" he asked, looking into my eyes.

"I have no hens to set, thanks to certain of your cloth," said I, thinking of a night when my most cherished pullets departed their cozy domicile with loud lamentations. 'T was the night of the visit of the Reverend Anthony Hartwell.

"Mr. Murray?" called a shrill, feminine voice. He did not hear, or, if he heard, paid no heed.

"Somebody calls you, Mr. Murray," said I.

He turned, but just in time to see Jayne Collins of the large mouth and larger voice switch her trailing skirts back into the church.

"Your cake 's dough, she 's caught him you know," was wafted upon the breeze from the perching pole, and, as martial music, accelerated the retreat. The minister flushed.

"Go see what she wants, and—console her."

"Will you wait here? I am going your way."

"Would the judges on the bench approve?" I spoke low, glancing toward the perchers.

"I care not whether they approve or not," he replied rather warmly.

"Good-bye!" I said, turning to leave him, and determined that a man so badly "spoiled" as he should suffer no further infection from me. When he had finished his business with the organist, I was well on my way home and saw him no more that morning.

I heard afterwards that on the following Sab-

bath, the minister requested the men, especially the heads of families, to enter the church with their wives and daughters; giving as his plea the opinion that those few moments preceding the service should be passed in silent meditation and careful preparation rather than in idle gossip outside.

I reached home ahead of Cousin Peggy. A few moments later she came panting up the terrace.

"Well, he shook you, did he?" she said exultantly.

"Who,—Dr. Worthington?"

"No. Mr. Murray."

"Certainly, he shook my hand."

"I saw him. He left you to talk to Jayne Collins."

"Did you catch up with Dr. Worthington?" asked I, to whom came a vision of an agile doctor escaping down the church hill ahead of a certain enterprising lady.

Cousin Peggy's thin nostrils dilated.

"I looked for you as I left the church," said I after a silence.

"Looked! Yes, you looked like an idiot hanging on to that minister! Mrs. Martin said she couldn't get a chance to speak to him a minute about the Thanksgiving box. She said I ought to warn you about entrapping a susceptible young preacher."

"The Cuckoo is considerate; but, wouldn't I make an ideal minister's wife?"

"Really, Patsy, you should be more modest. Your familiarity with men may pass in the city, which, God knows, is an abandoned place. But the people here are very careful and very observant, an—"

"They are very observant indeed," I hastened to assure her. "Everyone here knows everyone else's business before the day closes; and their interest in me at present far exceeds their interest in their future state."

"They must be blind indeed not to notice your undue interest in Mr. Murray," she snorted.

"By the by, that reminds me of something," said I. "When I asked Mrs. Martin in the church where you were, she said she supposed you had the doctor cornered in the vestibule as usual, getting posters for your round of Good Samaritan visits this week."

"Who said—that?" gasped Cousin Peggy.

"Your friend, Mrs. Martin,—the Cuckoo."

"The chattering magpie—the hussy!—the—"

The dinner bell rang. This grieved me; for, had these appropriate epithets continued to flow uninterruptedly, they might, in time, have done full justice to the subject in hand.

CHAPTER X

A PRAYER-MEETING

Uncle Isham lost no time. The prayer-meeting was set for early lamplight that evening; and Cousin Peggy Jane and I were to encourage with our presence this attempted propitiation for some unknown but prodigious crime.

Long before dark, a goodly number of the faithful, and unfaithful as well, had assembled. Some came in a lively hope of spiritual strengthening; others,—it is to be feared the greater number,—came possessed of a still livelier hope of that which should strengthen the body temporal. But I have no supper on Sundays.

It was to be held in Uncle Isham's cabin. This cabin, a renovated relic of those palmier days of his race, was of logs, well chinked and daubed, and spotless within and without. The white-washed walls inside were well-nigh covered with bright pictures,—cover designs of "The Ram's Horn," "The Christian Herald," and other papers of a moral status not to be disputed. These pictures ranged in soldierlike precision around the walls, tier on tier. (Aunt Judy has been heard recently to deplore my extreme lack of order in the arrangement of my paintings.) Slit-bot-

tomed chairs, Uncle Isham's own make, were placed on two opposite sides of the room, with planks stretched between for fuller seating capacity. These planks swayed ominously now and then as a sister of formidable avoirdupois entered and deposited herself.

Our entrance was the signal for the opening of service. Uncle Isham, much respected as an orator of the emotional order, rose from his seat at a pine table in one corner of the room.

"Breddern an' sisters," he began in sepulchral tones; "onworthy chillun ob Gord-fearin' parents, hyar me!

"Las' night de Lord visited me in vishuns on meh bed. 'Isham,' sez he, 'Ise borne wid you no 'count black chillun a mighty long time, ebber since Ham transacted dat meanness. Ise a long-sufferin' marster; but dey's a limit, Isham; jes' one step funder on an' furninst dat limit is fire an' brimstone, hants an' debbils; an' right dyar's de place fur thieven' niggers. Meh min' 's sot, Isham, an' I pints you meh Jonah. Go ter Ninevah dat gret city, an' cry again her! De stench ob dat city am in meh nostrils. Soun' de note ob warnin'! An' if you plays de fool like dat Jonah did dey aint gwine come no fish ter swallow yer, an' vomit you outen hell fire." (Suppressed utterances of "Lord, hab mercy!" "Ise a los' sinner!" "Swallow me, whale!" with agonizing groans.)

"Now sinners, arter de rendition ob de hymn, 'Who done buil' de Ark?' Brudder Johnson will lead us to de throne ob mercy."

The hymn, raised by a fat sister in a high quaver, soon took on firmer proportions. The rafters trembled at the fierce onslaught. It was sung responsively, the women taking the interrogation:

Who buil' de Ark? (women)

Noah! Noah! (men)

Who buil' de Ark?

Brudder Noah buil' de Ark.

Who squinched de lions?

Daniel! Daniel!

Who squinched de lions?

Brudder Daniel squinched de lions.

Who walk de sea?

Peter! Peter!

Who walk de sea?

Brudder Peter walk de sea.

Each stanza was repeated, the last line of the repetition being sung in chorus with appalling volume. There were many more stanzas; in fact the singing of that hymn must have consumed no less than ten minutes' time.

Cousin Peggy, with her Bible and "Laudes Domini" hymnal, now looked hopefully about for

a way of escape. Such was not to be found. Sandwiched between two elephantine sisters, it was with difficulty that we protruded so much as our noses; while the rhythm sustained by our unwilling bodies to their swaying exaltation, was little short of rhapsodic. I learned at this time that Cousin Peggy has an infirmity, though a hidden one. The knowledge was forced upon me by her fervent remarks when the fat one on her side brought down a delicate foot to emphasize the rhythm.

Now rose brother Johnson's voice, sometimes well-nigh drowned by heart-rending groans and petitions for mercy:

"O Lord in Hebben, whose throne am ob jasper, an' de cuishions de down ob angels' wings! Notwithstandin' dem clouds ob glory billowin' roun', an' myriads ob ran-sed sinners shovin' fur room, nebberdeless, youse got a fur-reachin' eye. Sittin' dyar in ease an' majesticness, you calls de swift-winged Gabriel an' sez: 'Gabriel, whence comes thou?' 'I comes,' sez Gabriel, 'from de four corners ob de earth, an' from walkin' up an' down in de same.' 'What 's dem black specks I see, Gabriel, dem drone bees buzzin' round de Debbil's 'lasses jug o' sin down dyar?' "Dem 's niggers, Lord,' meck answer Gabriel, 'lazy, thievin' niggers!' Den sez thou: 'dey mus' be sabed; but hit 's gwine take some powerful rasslin' wid Satan to deliberate 'em, an' soak off dat sticky slime.' " (Cries of "Help, Lord!" "Yass, Lord!" "Come down, Jesus!")

"Yass, come down, Lord! Retch out dat strong arm; seize us on de broad road ob ruin; haul us back inter de narrer parf. Lord, hit 's mighty nar-rer, hits mighty steep! an' dat road is dat chock full ob 'lurements of Satan—razzors, watermil-lions, chicken roos'! our tongues is prone ter sass; our feet nachelly itches ter dance inter hell fire at de soun' ob de banjo an' de fiddle!" ("Deed, Lord!" "So, Lord!") "But 'member, Lord, you createn us, outen garbage an' scraps, hit 's truf, nebberdeless you done it; so you'll hab ter bear wid us, excusin' o' what you done meck us outen. Hab mercy, Lord! Sabe us from hants, from witches, an' from debbils; an' gib us alley room somers up dyar 'twixt dem many mansions. Amen!"

By this time the audience had reached a state of exhilaration bordering on frenzy. As the "amen" was uttered, a sister, sitting just in front of us, rose up suddenly, stuck out her pudgy arms regardless of proximity, and catching a neighbor roundly under the chin, fell back upon Cousin Peggy's lap.

There are individuals in this world to whom things are always happening. My cousin is one of these. Her present situation was to be regarded, even by me who am broad-minded, as unfortunate. To rise and flee having now become utterly impossible, she did what remained possible—she sat still, and turned on me a look that

will not be forgotten; a look so replete with fear and horror, with repugnance and abject misery, that, detecting a rising tendency to smile, I choked it valiantly.

The sister was, to all appearances, stone dead; not so much as a muscle quivered. After she had rested for some moments in Cousin Peggy's embrace, her people were at last persuaded that a change of venue need not interfere with the spirit's workings; so they bore her outside, where the combined use of water, frost, dogs and darkness hauled her back to regions whose influences upon her were less fraught with terror to her neighbors.

From all past experiences I was wholly unprepared for such enthusiastic developments at a prayer-meeting; and hastening up, implored Uncle Isham to apply restoratives. But, for my interest, a rebuke was administered me:

"Squinch not de sperrit, chile! squinch not de sperrit,—hit 's rasslin' wid 'em!"

Cousin Peggy, taking advantage of my absence, fled to the door; and there, confused and trembling, fell into the arms of Dr. Worthington.

"Warming up, eh?" chuckled the latter, disengaging himself with some difficulty from her terrified clutches.

"Good Sakes, Doctor; I've just been sat upon. Carry me out,—O carry me out!"

"And what may be your avoirdupois, fair lady?" groaned the doctor, plucking her by the

waist. Whereupon she retreated, having boxed her companion's jaws roundly.

For the first time I saw Mr. Murray, standing behind the doctor. He came up to me.

"This is no place for you alone,—come!" He took my arm. There was nothing else to do, I went with him.

After handing me over to the care of Dr. Worthington, for the world as if I were his pocketbook, he retraced his steps to the table. Instantly the hubbub ceased. Speaking a word to the old man, he took from his pocket a small, worn Testament, and read from it with a sweet pathos that matchless prose poem, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, while so quietly the people sat, the breathing of the spirit-racked victim could be heard from without. Then, after a short, earnest prayer, he spoke of Christ; of His simple, self-effacing life; of His matchless example; of His love for the poor and the ignorant; of His bitter death for all; and of His will that the humblest accept Him.

During the utterance of his tactful words the negroes sat drinking in every syllable, their poetic souls stirred by the rhythmic fascination of his speech. Sometimes a tear would brim over, being wiped off hurriedly lest the weakness be detected. But I heard not a groan; there was no more treading upon toes, no wails for mercy. Then I fell to marveling at the mental gulf fixed between

this man and his hearers. His intellect could soar with ease into atmospheres impossible for them; and again it could touch its wings to earth to guide them tenderly into cleaner paths of understanding. What might they become had they such minds as his to lead them? Then I wondered how many centuries of heredity and environment would evolve a like result in Uncle Isham's cerebral mechanism; and so busily was I engaged in weighing their respective brains, and comparing respective cells and tissues, that I forgot to move when it was over.

"Gord bless you, Marse Murray!" exclaimed Uncle Isham, taking the white hand of the minister. "Youse got de sperrit in yer heart; I kin feel 'im oozin' out whiles you norates!"

We went quietly toward the house; upon reaching the veranda Dr. Worthington came to my side.

"The night is mild, will you walk for a moment?" he asked. "That pitcher has great ears, has she not?"

"Great ears and a greater mouth," I replied laughing, and leading the way down the terrace toward the Jungle. I knew that he had something of importance to say.

I could feel Cousin Peggy's jaw drop. The two stood, looking after us.

"Patsy!" she called: "It 's the Sabbath!"

"And a fair and peaceful Sabbath," called the doctor.

"Where are you going, Patsy?"

I affected not to hear.

"I wash my hands of that girl!" I heard her exclaim to the minister as he followed her into the house.

"Miss Grigsby," said my companion when we were well out of hearing, "it is of the Sang Digger and his daughter I would speak to you. Doubtless you have heard the gossip. Because of the girl's pale face, because, too, of the voluntary seclusion in which she lives, the tale has gone abroad that she is a leper, and that her father sacrifices his life for her to keep her apart from her kind in that hellish hollow. Though I have never yet seen her well, as far as I am a judge she has no symptoms of that dread malady. I take it that she is ill of an incurable disease of the mind. That they choose to live in retirement should be a matter of no special interest to our good neighbors. The villagers, however, threaten to boycott them, thinking to starve them to flight. The grocer, only yesterday, told me that he had received an anonymous note stating that supplies sold henceforth to the Sang Digger would be sold at his risk. And now I come to my point—to the object of my visit to you this evening:

"They say that the old man wanders abroad by night, and that his feet carry him this way into your Jungle. They have no assurance that he speaks with you, though an idle tale has gone

abroad that he sings at night beneath your window. They propose to watch to see if you have dealings with these people, and if you have, to boycott you also."

I walked by the physician's side in silence, but the hand on my companion's arm must have trembled, for he placed his own reassuringly over it.

"You wonder, perhaps, Miss Grigsby, that I bring this fools' talk to your ear. But I have spent my life in solicitude for others; and I would ill see this harmless old man injured because of senseless gossip,—and you, my dear child, you are the daughter of my boyhood's friend—!" His voice broke. "Believe me, I am convinced that you have no dealings with this man unless it be to serve him in some deed of mercy. But I beg of you, *be cautious*; you are a stranger here, and the goings in and out of a stranger in Mooretown are carefully watched. I feel sure they will not carry out their threat to boycott you also, and I will do what a physician can to dissuade their minds of this tomfoolery. I even propose to visit the girl in person and prove to them in open statement that their fears are groundless."

"'T is sheer nonsense!" I replied as carelessly as I might. "Does not the path to his boat lie through this wood?"

"But they say he comes here by night."

"That I know not," I replied warmly. "That

he hies abroad when and where he will is no business of mine."

"I passed him, or some old man, though he looked smaller than the Sang Digger, as I approached the house to-night. He seemed to be coming this way."

I stood still for an instant, listening. Then, tugging at my companion's sleeve, said hastily:

"Come, let us return; the minister will not understand."

Turning, I almost dragged the astonished practitioner back over the path. A rabbit started up and hopped away; I jumped and clutched his arm. A wakeful bird or some night creature stirred in the bushes near me; I shuddered, and clung closer. Though the doctor must have thought it, was it the Sang Digger I feared to meet? Ah, no! I seemed to stand cowering in the moonlight again, listening to the execrations of that fearsome creature, the Goblin. His diabolical laugh rang in my ears. I saw again the glitter of those eyeballs that had held me helpless as a charmed bird.

As we neared the stone stoop upon which I had first discovered him that night, I hesitated, half expecting to see that grim figure rise to confront us. The stoop lay in shadow; but looking closely again, I distinguished more than the familiar outline of stone. Something was sitting there in the darkness, something large and black. It moved.

I stopped short, my courage that had been wan-

ing for some minutes now vanishing entirely. Dragging the doctor violently backward, I shrieked into his ear, terrified beyond knowing what I said:

“There! There! Look!!”

The Sang Digger, for it was he, stood up; and from out his heavy brows his eyes flashed a quick look of inquiry into mine.

Finding that the visitor was not the Goblin, the relief was overwhelming. I drew myself up boldly to regain my spirit by resenting this intrusion.

“May I ask why you, a stranger, come thus to sit in dark corners to spy upon me?”

He gave me no answer; but his eyes, burning into mine, seemed to study me, while they wove about me an unaccountable fascination. Here was an old man, stooping, gray-bearded, quaint in dress and manner; that other was young, well dressed, handsome. Yet there came over me a sweet confusion of senses that, smiting upon the ear of my spirit, reissued in the words of that sere-nade:

Before mine eyes beheld him
Sleep never was my foe!
Ah! hand in hand with sorrow
Love e'er is wont to go.

“Who are you, sir, and why do you sit here?”
I asked more gently.

"My name you know, fair one. I came to hear the music of your voice."

"Eh?" said the doctor.

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils—

repeated the old man. "I am, as you know a dweller of the hills. And, though upon yonder heights breathe whispers of Nature's harmony, which harmony her every smallest work in voice or motion speaks, 't is oft too clarion for mine ears: the cry of the eagle, 't is the ringing cry of freedom; the wind in the pinetops, 't is the wail of a soul in Inferno; the roll of the thunder, 't is the great Thor on his warpath. My heart at times harks for the music of the valleys—the song of the Siren." So saying, he bowed low; and turning, left us.

"A queer fish that!" exclaimed the doctor, after a pause in which we both had gazed silently at the retreating figure; "a queer fish, and one, I am convinced, to tickle the palates of epicures."

"You see, he but comes to listen to my piano; I often play and sing for hours in the evening."

"To me he is a bundle of mystery. I would know more of him ere I rest content to have him hang about your unprotected home. Zounds, child, you need a husband! You should not stay

here with no one but those negroes and that gossiping cousin!"

"Come, 't is time we found her," I replied, laughing and running up the terrace to the veranda.

CHAPTER XI

I AM IN PERIL

November had come, the month that from beginning to end seems set to strains of requiem music. The Morning spread her wings reluctantly from out the borders of darkness. Then, after the cool, white dawn, although the sun stepped up from behind the craggy wall that hemmed the valley, he was mist-shrouded; and only when high up did he smile, sending beams of warm radiance to earth. Then how sad were those days when Nature united her powers to chant her passing glory! All through their length the sun shone warmly, but through mist-dimmed eyes; the birds that had not already passed from us made feeble efforts at song, striving to forget in the sun's radiance the chilling frost that was to follow the day's death. But their chirpings spoke forebodings of an oncoming gloom and disaster.

One sun-drenched day I sallied forth, well-nigh deceived into a hopeful search for flowers. But the gray plumes of the once gorgeous goldenrod told the tale, as did the shattered pods of the milkweed. I lolled upon a mossbank on a sunny southern slope. Then I desecrated a whole cemetery of dead leaves in search for nuts, and buried

myself in the rustling depths, while a pleasing thoughtfulness possessed me. Why were these days called the Indian's summer? Was it because his race passed a summer like them, riotous, free, glorious, followed all too soon by the onset of desolation?

Day by day during this perfect weather I had sought the river; and floating upon its bosom, had watched for some sign of the Sang Digger's daughter. For, since that night by the river, when a flare of light had revealed her face turned to me in supplication, I had longed with ever increasing eagerness to seek her out in her unnatural abode and offer to her the solace that a woman alone can give to one of her sex in trouble. Then, too, I wished to return the locket and learn, if possible, the reason for the strong resemblance between the face within and my father's. As to the fears of the minister and Dr. Worthington, I laughed at them.

One morning toward the close of the Indian Summer, after a restless night, I set out to find her; and, guiding my boat across the shifting current, drew cautiously up to the mouth of the gorge on the opposite side. After looking carefully about for the vanishing form of the truth-loving Jim, I screened the boat behind a low-bending sycamore, and sprang to a shelving rock.

A monster bullfrog, surprised by an unexpected visitor, descended into his boudoir in a most un-

cordial haste. A pair of bright eyes peeped up from the lush green plants that fringed the water, but disappeared quickly beneath the surface; then I soon discovered a small gray nose setting keel briskly out to midstream—Mrs. Water Rat would likewise be “not at home” to callers. A gray tail whisked around the bole of an oak-tree and off up the gorge to where an Indian-hen screamed her discordant notes on the fresh morning air.

The gorge, piled high with rocks of varying size, rose narrower and steeper as it made its way back between two bold ridges. With utmost difficulty I climbed or crawled or jumped my way up this Devil’s-hollow, losing much epidermis and more patience, and making withal slow and uncertain headway. Gaining a point some distance up, near to where a perpendicular wall of rock seemed to terminate the gorge, I stopped; and seeing no way around but to climb the steep ravine-side, turned to begin the difficult ascent. As I turned, however, a stone under my foot slipped; and I sank to the ground with a groan, and a sprained ankle.

For perhaps a minute it was impossible to rise; then, as I struggled to my feet, there sounded not five steps from me, a low, metallic noise, like the striking of a pod of rattlewort. A cold shiver went over me. Forgetting my ankle, I leaped up and back, with a loud shriek; and just in time, for there struck upon the stone that had tripped

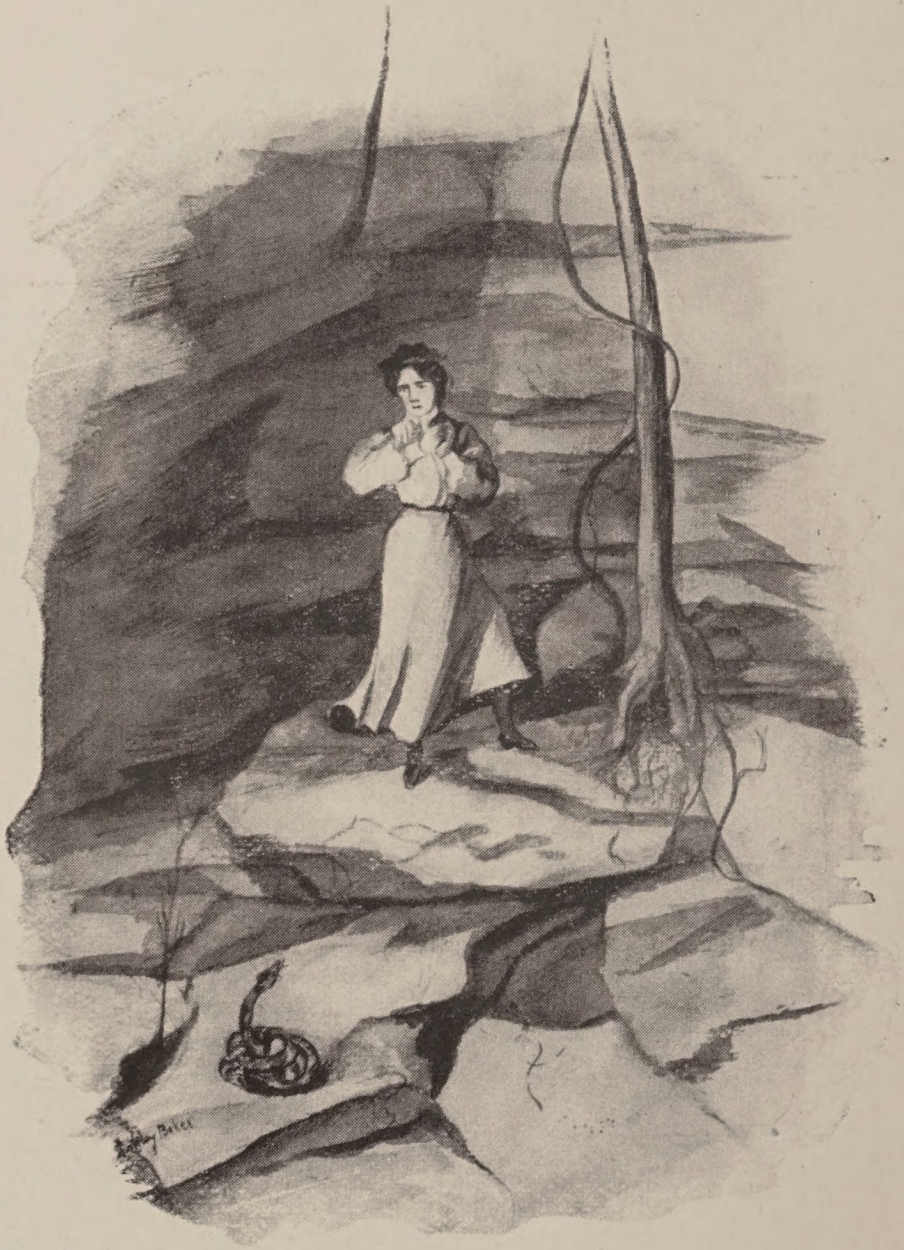
me, the dark-blotched body of a snake—the deadly rattler. I had little thought to see this fearsome mountain reptile at so late a day in autumn; but the warm sun had lured him from his winter quarter, and permeating his hateful form with heat and life, had waked within him his Eden-old spirit of antagonism to man.

A fury of rage possessed him at the escape of his victim. Hissing and writhing, he began to recoil for another and surer spring. His beady eyes were fastened on mine; his death-laden tongue flashed in and out of his wide-open mouth swifter than a weaver's shuttle; the loathsome head rose from the heavy coil, swelling, diminishing, eager to bury its fangs in my flesh.

Instead of retracing my steps, I had, in my haste and dismay, fled backward into a niche in the ravine's precipitous side. There was no way of escape except to pass over the snake that even now was ready to spring. But those glittering, green-bead eyes, how they held me! I stood, my hands clasped tightly, held still by a queer fascination, watching the dizzy play of the death fang, counting the seconds.

The thick, mud-brown coils—there were three of them—grew tort. There was a quiver through their spiral length. The horny joints—they were eleven—gave forth again their clatter. By a supreme effort I closed my eyes.

There was a quick stir on the high bank of the ravine opposite me, and a man's voice cried out in



“Counting the seconds.”

a hollow tone of anguish, a voice that even in my extremity I seemed to have heard before, "My God—Miss Grigsby!" Then came a sharp report; and a bullet struck the rock, and buried itself into the bank six inches from my feet.

In the reaction which followed, I sank to the ground and gave vent to a fit of hysterical weeping; while the serpent, coiling and recoiling, lapped and twisted its unsightly, headless form in and out, over and under the rocks in the ravine-bed, dyeing red the water of a rill that fretted its way down to the river. When I could lift my eyes to the ravine's edge, I saw no man; but the Sang Digger's daughter stood silently watching me. She wore a sunbonnet that screened her face; and her long black hair hung as she always wore it, loose, and far down her back.

It was with difficulty that I broke the silence.

"Where is he—the man who saved my life? I heard his voice—he called my name!"

She shook her head, pointing off over the mountain ridge. Then I struggled painfully to my feet from the stone that had come so near to being an altar of human sacrifice. I was tired and sick; my head throbbed; my ankle throbbed. How was I to drag myself back down that rough ravine, or worse still, to climb its sides! The girl made no move, though she seemed to struggle with some strong desire to come to my aid. Her arms went out once in a quick, involuntary gesture toward

me; then she beckoned to a spot a short distance above, where a terrace of rock facilitated the ascent from the gorge; and turning, hurried off by an intricate mountain path and was soon lost to view.

As for me, having reached the mountain slope, and taken a moment in which to be thankful for my timely deliverance and to regain my nerve, I determined to fulfil if possible my resolve to search out her abode; and set off up the slope in the direction she had taken. Up and up, through a glade of oaks, chestnuts, and poplars, I followed the windings of a path that seemed to have known little use. Then over a rocky steep where huckleberry, laurel and rhododendron bushes concealed the path from my view, while underfoot I trampled ferns of many forms of loveliness, green and crimson galax leaves, whole beds of reindeer moss, and many-hued mushrooms.

After a time I came upon a pile of isolated rocks, so thickly surrounded by trees and underbrush as to be well screened from the casual glance. Behind one of these boulders, and in an angle made by the conjunction of this rock with a second like it in size and shape, I came upon the hut of the Sang Digger. Its opening faced up-hill. On the sides unprotected by rock the walls were of logs, poorly chinked, and daubed with hard, red clay. The roof was of saplings, cedar boughs, and leaves, and seemed to be rather

insufficient shelter against the storms of winter. The floor was the bare ground. In one corner, a pile of fir and spruce boughs, overspread with a faded quilt, formed the only bed. There were two rude stools, a stump smoothly sawed off for a table, and a few cooking utensils about. Some tattered garments adorned the walls; and in one corner lay the Sang Digger's tools beside a considerable pile of large and symmetrical roots of ginseng.

I went over to examine this heap, for ginseng interests me much. I noticed at once, however,—for I had read with interest certain papers issued from the Government Botanical Office regarding the life habits of the plant—that these roots were unlike the small, curiously shaped specimens found in the Blue Mountains and sold to our valley shopkeepers. They were large, smooth and firm, and of superior shape and heaviness.

The rude hovel had also in its unstable structure, and in the scanty appointments of its interior, a strong suggestion of disuse. The boughs that formed the couch had never been disturbed since they were placed in position, and that could not have been recently, for they were withered, many of the evergreen spines having fallen about the bed. The cooking utensils to be seen were rusted from dampness and idleness. An iron pot in one corner was half filled with stagnant water, and over its top was woven a graceful veil of cobweb. There

was no evidence of recent fires within, though the nights were frosty. There was no worn path without, no trampled turf or easy lolling place.

One fact was evident: if these queer people lived on this mountain, then there was another and surer hiding place.

After having completed my investigations, listening the while for the sound of footsteps, I sank upon one of the stools to rest before the descent to the river. Then, weary from unwonted excitement and over-exertion, I leaned my head forward on the stump table, and, ere I knew what was happening, fell asleep.

I shall never know how long I slept; it may have been a minute, or it may have been an hour. But suddenly I woke, conscious of being watched, and looked up to encounter the gleaming eyes of the Goblin—would God it had rather been the rattler come again to strike me!

And indeed a serpent he seemed. His body writhed in exultation; the beady eyes glittered; the shriveled lips parted, then closed as if drinking in foretaste the lifeblood of his victim. He came a step nearer to me, then laughed that laugh that had visited me in many night vigils. I rose to my feet and raised a hand as if to ward off a blow, but was unable otherwise to move. He stepped yet closer; my breath came in gasps.

"Ha! Ha!" he sneered. "Fine lady, indeed, is

Miss Patsy! An early climb and a rest in a poet's hovel is not unpleasant—nor the kiss of an exile!”

“Monster!” I shrieked. “Are you demoniac or devil, and is this indeed the gate of hell?”

“Where willing victims press the portals hard!”

“I visit the Sang Digger's daughter; are you his friend?”

“I know them not, nor care,—’t is you I visit, child of a cursed house!”

“Will you kindly name my transgression, sir?” I said with the calmness of despair.

“Did I not warn you of evil if you stayed, wasting in sinful ease the lawful heritage of others?”

“You are mistaken, sir; I came by my inheritance lawfully. I am an only child and my parents long dead.”

“And your father—” he hissed.

“—was the only son of *his* father, the lamented James Grigsby.”

His eyes leaped as in fire. He came up to me and laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, peering into my face exultantly.

“Your grandsire—the lamented James Grigsby! Was *he* an only son? Of what outcast was he the younger brother? From whom did he obtain an unlawful inheritance, and from whom did he entice the heart of the lovely Patsy? Who watched him in secret many years waiting the sure moment,

and, when that moment came, laid the thief and traitor low? I, his elder brother, John—I, the despised, the outcast—I slew him! And a solemn vow I have made to blot out his seed ere I die happy—know you what that is?” he shrieked into my face.

Twice I lifted my voice to cry for help, but the call choked in my throat. That I was at the mercy of some madman was evident. That his grievance was as real as he imagined, could not be, else why had I not heard of it? I had heard often that my grandfather had died suddenly, but nothing more. I felt my breast. Yes, it was there, but the extremity must be indeed bitter that I resort to such means for my salvation. First I would try the calm speech of reason.

“You have doubtless suffered unjustly, sir,” said I moving off from him, and holding still to the stock of my pistol, which I intended to use did he again approach me. “If I find that I hold what is yours I will most gladly restore it, to the last penny. But can this be proven?”

“Are there none to tell you of John Grigsby, the elder brother of that James, the favored son?” he asked, his voice quivering.

“I have known nothing of my father’s people. He died during my early childhood, and since then I have lived with my mother’s people, or alone.”

“Do not these people of Mooretown tell you of me?”

"I ask them nothing. But tell me, have you descendants—children or grandchildren?"

He sank upon one of the stools and buried his face in his hands. How pitiable he seemed, this wreck of human passions! He was as a child in his vacillating moods. A moment ago raging as a beast to pounce upon its victim, some slender thread of memory, vibrated by a word, now tugged at its moorings far dawn in a secret chamber of his heart—a chamber that, amid all around cold and stony, moored that thread in vulnerable flesh. He gave me no answer, but sat tracking that memory, (so I fancied) back through the shadowy past. An inspiration seized me. I opened the Sang Digger's locket and held it before him.

"Perhaps," said I, "if you be of a line of my house, you may have seen this face—may know her. She resembles my father to a striking degree, yet I do not know her."

He raised his head slowly; and taking a pair of old iron-rimmed spectacles from his pocket, adjusted them, and took the locket into his hand. For what then followed I was not prepared, even by the strange actions that had gone before.

A groan escaped him. He pressed the face again and again to his, while a torrent of words fell from his lips upon that little ear before him. I stood by, my heart full of sorrow for him, while from out his blurred past a face with gray

eyes looked on him yearningly. The present, with its satanic purpose, was forgotten.

"My child, my child, my little Patsy!" he moaned, fondling the locket, while a flood of tears came down upon it.

"She is your child?" I asked eagerly.

"My only child that I drove from me, in anger that she opposed my will. Yet I loved her, for she and her bright-faced baby boy were all I had—all I had ever had. All my life since I have sought them. How came you by this? I gave it to her, myself, long years ago."

"It was lost on the river bank one morning by the Sang Digger. I found it, and came this morning to return it."

"He—he?" he stammered. "That old man—could he have married her?" he turned to me with childish eagerness.

"We will find him and ask," I said, to comfort him.

Just then a quick step without was heard approaching the hut. Joyfully I hastened to the entrance, but there stopped short. The day's wonders were not yet over.

Coming up over the slope from the left was a young man, walking with quick, swinging strides. He was dressed in a well-fitting business suit of dark gray; his linen was spotless, and his bearing that of the finished man of the world. As he stepped swiftly toward me he removed his hat,

and I noticed that his hair was black and his eyes the eyes of the locket. Also I knew that this was by no means our first meeting. I stood still, awaiting him as I had done so often in that olden time,—a flood of wild, sweet memories surging through my brain. Then suddenly, as he held out his hands to me and a great light filled his eyes with beauty, a conviction seized me. I staggered back from him shuddering, while the far-off murmur of a glad, new song was hushed in my heart.

“You—are—the—Sang—Digger!” I cried brokenly.

But the old man wedged past me in tremulous haste; and, hobbling up to the newcomer, looked him in the face. Then, throwing up his arms, he shrieked, “My boy, my boy!” and fell, swooning.

Feeling that the place was not for me, and scarcely knowing what I did, I slipped behind the pile of rocks, unnoticed, and fled wildly down the mountain as well as my sprained ankle would allow. Below, I could hear the boom of the river. On it was my boat, and across it—the Nunnery.

One thing was certain: I would go no more alone on the mountain above Hell-Gate Hollow.

CHAPTER XII

I PAY CALLS

Those who are wont to hide under a cloak of duty their own abnormal propensity for gadding have been heard to remark that one who is generally at home is there because of selfishness. Perhaps this is true. Perhaps the shirking of formal calls that accomplish no errand of mercy or love, that interrupt household duties and disseminate gossip, is through selfishness; the performance of them the fulfillment of duty. I am not able to judge. But this I *do* know: I do not like duty, for with me duty is sure to be something that I specially dislike doing.—And “duty,” in the garb of calls, now stared me cruelly in the face.

Among the many things said by the Mole to distress me on the morning of her call, her remark that people thought me “stuck up” distressed me most. If anything grieves me, it is for people to accuse me of being haughty; for I am not. Simply, I have a notion—erroneous, perhaps—that my own home is the place for me to live in—not the homes of my good neighbors. If I could induce them to view it in the same light we might come to a better understanding.

But it is the truth that hurts, and the truth lay

bald before me. I had not returned one call in all these weeks. If there was, stored back in memory somewhere, a once diligently followed rule that calls must be returned within a given time, I had elected to disregard it in my new life. That rule seemed part of a past that I now made it my business to forget. I had likewise forgotten that I had neighbors, to whom I owed consideration, for they had been kind as only Virginia neighbors can be.

Now the Mole, instead of destroying seed, as is the way of other moles had planted a germinant seed in my careless heart. No sooner had she departed than I began to feel uncomfortable; ever since, my conscience had kept up an industrious ploughing and digging, and in various ways known to agriculturists had rendered the soil fertile for that little seed. Until at last, feeling guilty of some enormous offense, I scarcely knew what, against humanity, I ordered the surrey, and invited Cousin Peggy for an afternoon of agonizing labor paying calls about the village.

Calls! Is there a woman living who enjoys paying duty calls? Can social science explain their mysteries? How we dread going, and with what sinking of heart our victim hears our unwelcome ring at the door! What mutual delight we express thus to be able to sit opposite one another for some minutes talking insipid nonsense! Then,

when the escape has been effected, how thankfully we hie us home, our consciences exhilarated almost to intoxication because of duty done; while the other goes about her waiting duties buoyed up by a conviction of her popularity.

I speak not of those dear to me, the breath of whose presence is as the odor of sweet violets, and whom I would gladly have ever with me, but of those whose friendship is a matter of etiquette or compulsion. And it is a thing of joy to me that Mrs. Williams is the only one of this sort within popping-in distance, so to speak. I can endure her, I hope, since she is but one; but to have people that I do not love, and who care less than nothing for me, thrusting themselves suddenly upon me at all unguarded moments,—how on earth am I ever to get anything done in life, or endure it to the allotted limit?

We made many calls that afternoon, but of one only will I speak, for reasons to be revealed later. It was at the home of the Misses McNutt. They need no introduction. Who does not know the McNutts or their ancestors? They, themselves, are heaped about and borne aloft upon a glorified pedestal of petrified ancestors' bones. In this heap, I learned from the "Book of Genealogies," produced for our entertainment, are the bones of a general, a colonel, two lieutenants, a governor, and many legislators, lawyers, and ministers. They seemed to have developed greatness as nat-

urally as an infant porker develops a good appetite. (I know only one male descendant of the McNutt line. He is a grocer's clerk, and yesterday sold me some eggs that he guaranteed to be fresh, but which, for private reasons, I returned.)

As they entered the room there came with them a faint essence of lavender and rose leaves, such as our grandmothers delighted in. Miss Jessica, the younger, especially, radiated from all her tiny body a subtle influence; I know not what to call it, unless it be the fragrance of that innate and all-pervading refinement which can no more be hidden than can delicate aromas in crushed vessels. We were greeted with a gentle courtesy and shown into the parlor, a room as ancient in its appointments and as spotlessly neat as its possessors. I shivered in my boots, for there was no fire until Miss Mariam, the elder sister, murmuring an apology for this economy in fuel, lighted the wood set on the hearth.

With the unwieldy family Bible on the center table lay the "Book of Genealogies and Reminiscences," without which the dignity of no F. F. V. can be sustained. Seizing this, Cousin Peggy engaged Miss Mariam in an animated discussion of forbears, while I sat by with Miss Jessica.

She asked kindly after my present life, and if I enjoyed the quiet of the country. She spoke of my mother, of her beauty, and of how proud I should be that I resembled her. She remembered

my father, and how he had worn a rose on his coat that she, herself, had plucked from a bush which she pointed out to me from the window, a bush which I saw had been carefully attended. Then, at her request, I went to the old melodeon and sang "I 'll Hang My Harp on a Willow Tree" and "Thou Hast Wounded the Spirit That Loved Thee," after which she thanked me and sat long in silence. Then I, looking into that sweet face, understood that behind that quiet life was a tragedy not concerned with those ancestors of hers.

She seemed to turn longingly to the past as it concerned my people and hers; and I listened with eagerness to what she little dreamed concerned my present life so vitally:

My great-grandfather, Reuben Grigsby, was a man of rare gifts and moral excellence. His father before him had achieved distinction during the Revolution, and had counted notable men his friends. His home was a rendezvous in this section of the Valley. Here were gathered at times many who bore the nation's weal upon their hearts, met for purposes concerning their country's good. Washington, on more than one occasion, rested his feet upon the sitting-room fender; and later on Jefferson, George Rogers Clark, and Meriwether Lewis, had been his welcome guests.

My great-grandfather was twice married; and there was a son by each marriage. The elder

son, John, left his home in early manhood, and had never been heard of since. He was thought to have been killed in the West in some Indian or Mexican raid, and being no favorite, was soon forgotten.

The second son, James, my grandfather, lived at the Nunnery. And when his only child, my father, was almost grown, a strange thing happened. It was during the time that preceded the Civil War, when trouble was brewing in every quarter for the Virginia gentry. Secret meetings were being held; and insurrectionists from the North threw firebrands of discontent and insubordination among the simple, ignorant negroes, who lived in easy, care-free contentment upon their masters' plantations. My grandfather, then in his prime, and possessed of clear judgment and shrewdness, was looked to as the vanquisher of these difficulties in this quarter. He visited the President and laid before him the surrounding conditions. He went further, and spoke on the platforms of the northern cities, endeavoring to place before the minds of an uninformed populace the true state of affairs. He strove by an example of kindly consideration for his slaves to instill into their hearts a sense of security in his protection, and a genuine regard for him. And he so far succeeded that but few of his seventy-five servants deserted him, until compelled by the change brought about by the war's close.

Several persons of unknown and doubtful identity were arrested at his suggestion, and held in security. And in this manner, while endearing himself by his devotion to duty to all whose interests and sympathies were one with his, he at the same time made many enemies. It was about the time of Virginia's secession that he disappeared, in an unaccountable manner.

Being indisposed, he had kept at home one Sabbath, while my grandmother and my father repaired to the meetinghouse for the morning service. On their return he was gone; and to this day no clue to the mystery has been found. The negroes reported no one about, although the dogs were heard to howl in a most doleful manner. Their actions awakened awful forebodings in the minds of the superstitious blacks, who dared not enter that portion of the house about which the uneasy canines hovered. His hat was found, as were all his personal belongings, in their wonted places; which precluded the idea that his disappearance was voluntary. It was thought by most that some political enemy, some emissary from the North perhaps, had secretly removed this obstacle to their intrigues. The darkies, however, and the more superstitious of the whites, to this day shake their heads ominously, and relate wonderful tales concerning the old house and its ghostly inhabitants, tales which

have gained weird significance with the passing years.

At a certain hour on that memorable Sabbath, the sun is said to have hidden its face behind a cloud of intense darkness that appeared suddenly in the clear sky; the house became wrapped in impenetrable gloom; rain of the blackness of ink fell on that portion of the house occupied by my unfortunate grandfather, the great library; fumes of smoke, smelling of sulphur, issued from the ground around the dwelling; household utensils, shovels, tongs, dishes, and the heavy cane of the victim, are reputed to have walked through fast-closed doors with loud clatterings; these and others were the omens of evil presage that attended this sad disappearance.

My grandmother, the lovely Patsy, always a fragile soul, survived the untimely death of her husband but a few months. These months were fraught with horror to her. She would start up from an unsound slumber, screaming that she had seen her husband, bound, gagged, emaciated, though still living, lying amid the filth of an unknown dungeon. At other times she heard his cries for help. She would never, after his disappearance, enter the library.

At her death her son, locking up the house, went to the far South. Here he entered the Confederate service, rose to the rank of major, and, sometime after the war's close, was married there to

my mother, a beautiful French girl of wealth and high birth. Once he brought her to the Valley, and for a short time they lived at the Nunnery. But the pervading gloom, and the strange events, related in highly colored garb to the young and impressionable wife by the servants, so preyed upon her mind that she pined visibly. Then my father, fearing for her a fate like his mother's removed with her and myself, an infant, to the city. Here she soon died, to be followed by my father to the grave when I was ten years old.

Strange to say, all of this except that which concerned my father was unknown to me. It seemed to verify, as far as it went, the old man's story, and so rendered my situation even more distressing. Could I, in order to rid myself of him, bring to public gaze this gruesome skeleton that was lurking in my family closet? This question I could not answer. At least I would be cautious, and wait.

Troubled by these things, yet thankful to Miss Jessica, I tore Cousin Peggy from Miss Mariam and the "Reminiscences," and we turned our faces homeward. I, at least, had relearned an old lesson: the path of duty may be strewn with thorns, but under the feet of him that travels it they soften into incense-breathing flowers of peace.

As we drove through the Jungle returning, something happened that broke the monotony of the journey. There darted across the path in

front of us a brown streak of fur with somewhere about it a white flag of truce bobbing energetically. Close behind came that lean hound of Uncle Isham's, the coon dog—adopted brother to Topsy,—Topsy himself, and two small specimens of negroid humanity. The procession passed as a whirlwind, and my frantic efforts to arrest it were offered to the winds. Then, climbing out of the surrey, I pursued hotly; and came upon them busily engaged in twisting the victim out of a hollow log by means of a forked stick.

For a moment I watched, horrified, seeing them, by much pushing and twisting, succeed in tearing off great bunches of wool. Then, as I hurried to the rescue, they hauled him out, squealing in agony, most of his furry coat gone, and too weak to escape; and the howling mob, closing in, crushed out his life. Clutching the larger boy by the shirt band I called loudly to Uncle Isham, who had driven the surrey.

He came; but instead of dealing out the justice I had meant he should, he held his sides and guffawed in a most unchristian manner.

"Give me a switch!" I yelled, swinging on to the culprit.

"Fo' de Lawd, Miss Patsy! what you gwine do ter dat chile? Aint I done sont 'im arter dat rabbit, purpose?"

Such cruelty is monstrous—I 'll not have it!

You imp!" I punctuated these remarks in a becoming manner.

"If yer wants a mess o' greens, let alone peas an' spinnage, in yo' gyarden nex' spring, better let dat critter git he funeral preached! Hi! don' I 'member dat day seventeen years gone when you an' dat sadger boy whar you got yo' haid sot on yanked de gret-gret-granddaddy o' dis pesky critter outen a log in dis same hollow? Fo' de Gracious! yo' Cousin Sarah shore did lay it on heavy!"

I flushed as I recalled the episode, and how angry my cousin had been, not so much at the act of cruelty, as that I had been found in the forbidden company of Gogaphy. But I scowled at the little wretch.

"Let me catch you at this again, Jim, and I 'll have you hanged, sure!—hear me?"

"Yass'm," answered Jim, grinning.

"Hi, nigger!" called Uncle Isham as we made our way back to the surrey, "tell Aunt Judy dat rabbit 's mighty young an' tender, an' Ise ridin' 'long dis road smellin' rabbit pie twill I kyarnt more'n set on dis seat,—git a move on, hyar me?"



“ ‘Give me a switch!’ I yelled.”

CHAPTER XIII

AN ENCOUNTER

Some days passed, days that were fraught with unrest to me. With fierce determination I strove to put from me the memory of the man who, once my childhood's hero, now, hiding from the eyes of old friends, perhaps from the keener eye of the law, lived in mean disguise upon the mountain, and not alone. Yet to me, and, as I believed, to no other, he had chosen to reveal himself, far surpassing in his splendid manhood my most extravagant hopes of him. My heart told me plainly why he had done this: it was no matter that the villagers regarded him lightly; but perhaps I had recognized him, and that *I* should regard him lightly was another thing entirely.

But for what should he live thus hidden away, who was now used to higher things? And the girl, his companion?—O, tricky heart of mine that would not behave itself, in spite of reason and all sense of becomingness! This much I would do, however much I suffered: although his confidence in approaching me argued, my heart said, for his innocence, still I would in no way give ear to him until he dispelled the dark cloud that hung over him.

One morning he called to see me; I sent him some excuse and kept my room. Once I came upon him at the mouth of the ravine by the river. He came towards me, his eyes beaming a joyous welcome, but I turned without a word and left him. Again one night he came, undisguised, and sang beneath my window. Peeping through the shutter, I saw him, and without a word of thanks or welcome, I flung myself upon the bed, sobbing. Had it not been for the comments of the villagers, and the exultant remarks of friends, I believe I would at this time have packed my trunks and fled ignominiously from the face of danger.

Soon after this, returning one day from an errand to the village, instead of taking the usual path on reaching the Jungle I plunged down the hill toward my Grotto, a rugged spot in the ravine which had been dedicated to moods and reveries. For some days I had feared to seek my favorite nook; but this day some occult force seemed to draw me. I lolled for a time upon the mossy stones; but that old-time feeling of sweet seclusion had deserted the sacred precincts. A squirrel sputtered at me from a near-by limb. A woodchuck, whom I had obliged to beat a hasty retreat into his hole in the bank, protruded his head for a closer survey; he no doubt took me, with my gray skirt, green waist, and turban, to be part of the moss-grown, gray limestones upon which I sat, for he was in no hurry to leave me.

At length I made my way down the ravine, thinking to unloose my boat for a row. Soon, however, I was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps. Seeing a fallen tree with its cavernous mouth turned up-hill, and thinking ever of an unwelcome encounter, I made haste to crouch inside where I was well hidden by dead limbs and the surrounding underbrush.

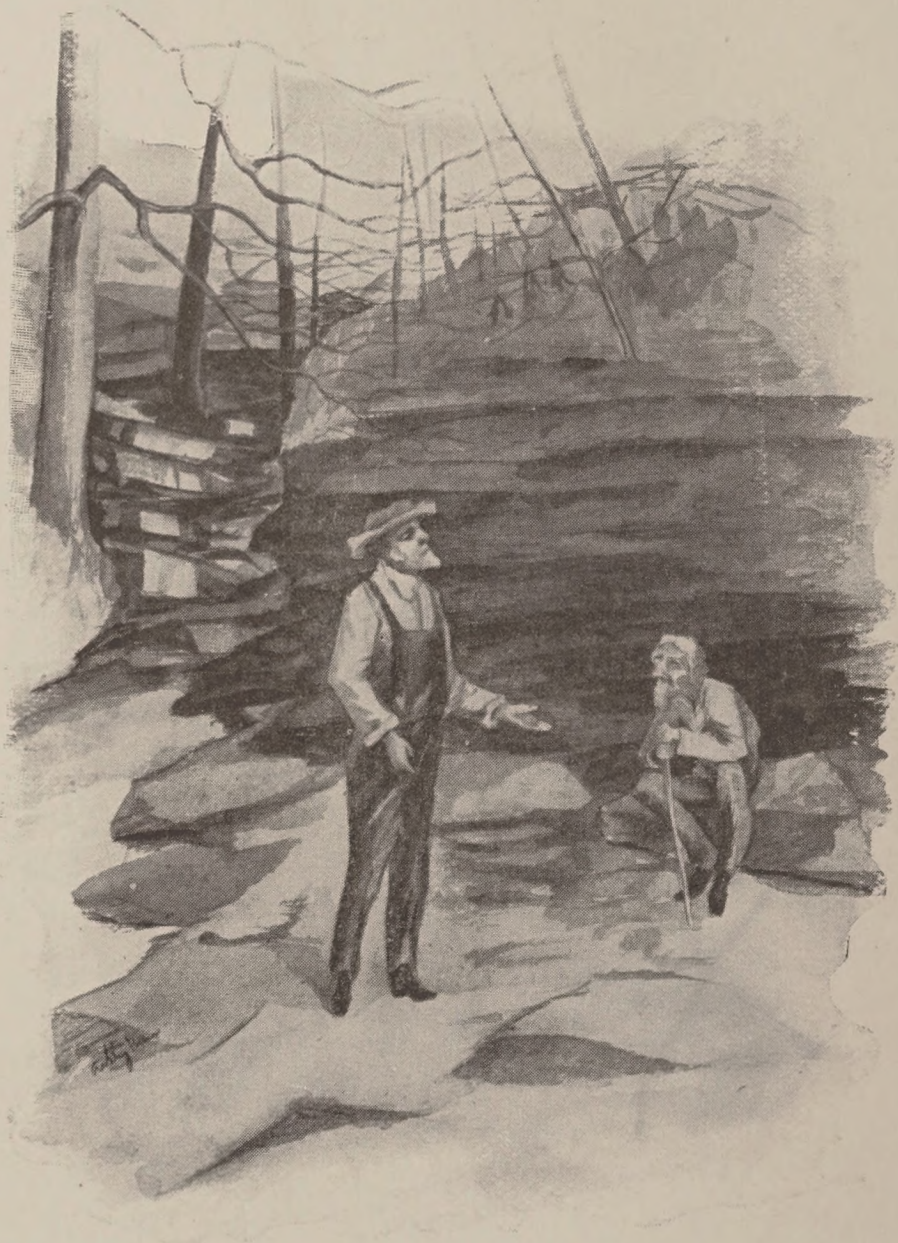
It was "the Sang Digger." He passed so near the log in which I lay, that, had he turned, he would have seen me. Straight, with an assured familiarity of his whereabouts, he went up the gulch. Sometimes he stopped to listen; and always, as he went, looked cautiously about. Then a cliff hid him.

I watched him out of sight; then creeping out, followed, determined to learn of his secret business. On nearing the Grotto, I heard the sound of voices, one speaking low and hurriedly, the other in louder, expostulating tones. At the sound of the latter I shuddered. Sitting on the same rock that a few moments before had held me, was my aged kinsman, the Goblin. He leaned heavily upon his staff, looking up into the face of Mr. Lovelace, who was speaking. I could not hear what they said, but the young man strode to and fro impatiently, stopping at times before the old man, who seemed to offer protests to the hurried words of his companion.

Of my feelings it is impossible to write. These

men, then, were in league against me, plotting for my inheritance. For this reason they had taken up their abode on the mountain, and that recognition that morning at the hut was a sham enacted to deceive me. My estate was a large one and valuable, and its possession might well entice their unworthy efforts, for they were next of kin, or, in years past, their claims may have been first. To keep that which was not mine, or ill-gotten, was not my desire; but to be secretly murdered as was my grandfather, and doubtless for the same reason, was still less to be thought of. Neither would I resign my claim through terror; so far as my legal guardians knew, it was undisputed, having been clearly stated in my father's will, and as clearly passed to him by the will of my grandfather. What was to be done?

Revolving these things in my troubled head, I had failed to consider the probability of an encounter until Mr. Lovelace turned suddenly and came toward me. But one way was left. Quickly as possible, I glided from boulder to tree-trunk, and thus made my way back down the ravine. When it became necessary to climb the hill to the left to reach the path, however, detection would be unavoidable, for I wore a gaudy waist. Therefore, regaining the log which had before concealed me but could not now as he approached its open side, I sat upon it and with what



“Plotting for my inheritance.”

show of unconcern was possible to me, waited the man I so much dreaded to meet.

He strode rapidly along the path. That he had not seen me was evident from his preoccupied manner; indeed he might never have discovered me had not the log across the path compelled him to look up searching a way about or over it. Seeing me he started, came toward me eagerly—then, seeming to reconsider, arrested his steps.

I said nothing, and my eyes that had devoured his splendid manliness as he came toward me, now gazed with unseeing indifference down the ravine.

"How came you here, Miss Grigsby?" he asked at length.

"How came *you* here, Mr. Lovelace?"

"You were not here a moment ago."

"I was."

"Why then did I not see you?"

"I do not recall that you looked; your business seemed urgent."

He made no answer.

"You do not deny it, then?"

"What would you have me deny?"

"That you had urgent business."

"I deny nothing."

"Suppose you remove that mask, Mr. Lovelace," said I, warning. "I scarcely recognize an old friend in such a garb—besides, it is awry."

Much to my surprise he raised his hand and

took the old-man mask from his face; and here again stood Gogaphy, than whom I had rather faced a dozen Sang Diggers.

"Many thanks for the suggestion," he said smiling into my face as he folded the lifelike visor and put it into his pocket. "Such humbugging is unnecessary between us."

"I like you better in it however," I replied savagely. "'T is more in keeping with your fraudulent practices!"

His firm jaw set, yet he gave me no answer.

"Mr. Lovelace," I said, my anger rising, "why do you hound me, you and your aged accomplice?"

"I have no accomplice, neither do I plot mischief against you, Miss Grigsby, though 't is no wonder that you misjudge me," he answered quietly.

"Then justify yourself, sir! I give you opportunity."

"'T is useless, 't is worse than useless, for you are a woman, and what woman is there who, scorning a man, will yet justify him? There is no sense of justice in her." Then he added bitterly: "Were I a vagabond, and your *accepted* lover—"

"Lover indeed!" I sneered. "A fine lover, lurking in hiding places, and not alone; sneaking about chimney corners at midnight; plotting with devils,—lover indeed!"

"Do not distress yourself!" he replied, standing

tall and straight before me: "because I choose to walk near your dwelling, or even to talk with devils in your ravine, because I cannot give you the reasons for my actions and my present manner of life, 't is no reason that I may not yet be your lover; for your lover I am, your lover I have been all my life, and will be till death." How proudly he said it, and how his eyes, the most magnetic I had ever seen, burned into mine the accumulated love of all his young years.

But from my eyes leaped no answering light. I drew myself up as to repel a blow. In a fury of rage I turned upon him.

"Are you aware that we have never met as man and woman should, that I would have been spared the insult of *this* meeting had you kept your unwelcome presence from where you have no right, no permission to intrude? Do you know that in this same log I hid that I might escape you hastening to your tryst with that demon there in my Grotto? For what do you torment me, dog my steps, threaten my life? Is it for my inheritance? Tell me, wretch,—hypocrite!" My hands clenched until the nails cut the flesh. I stood back against an old chestnut-tree for support. My eyes flashed fire, and I stamped the surrounding moss-bed, venting thus my wrath upon the head of innocence.

The man stood quietly, his hands behind him;

but I knew that they also were tightly clenched. The lines of his face were tense, and I saw through my anger that John Lovelace was fighting a battle. I scarcely knew the voice that answered me, so strange and hollow it sounded.

"Have you finished, Miss Grigsby?"

"Since words fail me—yes!" and my voice, hoarse with rage, startled me.

"Then I will say what I must, and we will part: I know well enough that you have avoided me, and for this I do not blame you. Why I sought you at first, I have already told you; a man cannot love a woman as I love you and remain apart from her when he lives so near the sound of her voice, the sight of her face. My feet lead me always, and through no will of mine, to stop near you. I am happy when I see the light from your window or hear the sound of your sweet voice, singing. It has been the beacon of my life—this deathless love I bear you, that has guided me all these years since that golden summer; guided me from a purposeless existence into an earnest striving for the higher things in life. You have remained, amid all that was hard and sordid and loveless, the one thing bright and beautiful. Therefore I love you, and even thus I am content, asking no love in return, for 'tis enough to know that this vision of my dream is no delusion.

"Of late, however, it has been for a twofold reason that I have sought you. It has been that I

might lend you a service which, God grant, you will never stand in need of; but which, should you need it, will be given you in spite of your resistance. That I have intruded my unwelcome presence in your neighborhood has been of late a necessity that I cannot explain. If you think a man whose duty cannot be explained must be a man without honor, you are mistaken. If you think that man finds pleasure in every duty imposed upon him, you deceive yourself also. It is what we must do for conscience sake, those duties that one cannot shirk and look God and man in the face, that make men of us. My workshop has ever been duty, its furnace affliction. The finished product I will render to my Great Taskmaster—I own no other.

“The other morning I called that I might explain, so far as was possible, my position, but you would not see me. Now I feel that you will not understand, nor, understanding, will concern yourself. I shall remove my hated proximity from you at my earliest opportunity, but not until all cause of danger be removed from you. So fear no alarm, Miss Grigsby; go on your gladsome way, and forget that I, with my burdened life, have crossed your pathway.” He lifted his hat and passed me, moving at a weary pace down the path to the river.

In an instant I was by his side, and my hand that touched his arm trembled.

"Stay!" I whispered hoarsely. "I will not let you go thus! If I have been cruel, unwomanly—forgive me! I but seek a solution to this mystery. I do not understand—I must know! Would to God I could trust you! Tell me, for I have suffered enough."

"You do not know what suffering is!" he answered fiercely. "You cannot, for you do not love!"

"My heart is dead, I think," I replied wearily, "but still I suffer."

Suddenly he confronted me, and look searchingly down into my eyes. Then a light overspread his face as the coming of dawn illumines the face of night; and a passionate trembling convulsed him. Ere I knew it, he took my hand, and, raising it to his lips, pressed burning kisses upon it, while he murmured:

"O Patsy, my beautiful girl! you love me, you cannot deny it!"

But I thought of the dumb girl. Then something gripped my heart; then, as an iron band, seemed to choke me. I tore myself from him, and grasping a hawbush for support, drew myself up proudly.

"How dare you!"

"You are mine, you have been mine for years; nothing can take you from me, for I know that you love me."

"Do I deserve this insult of you?" I cried, scarcely knowing what I said.

"I am not so unworthy of you," he answered with proud confidence, and holding himself straight before me.

"I fail to see it!" I sneered. "A mountain hovel for a home where someone listens for your footsteps!"

Again his lips set rigidly.

"If you think of the dumb girl, she concerns us not in this matter."

"Your concern for her seems small indeed! How many a midnight finds her sitting alone on that mountain awaiting your return from your prowlings? A fine guardian, such a one, to be seeking an additional charge."

He regarded me silently, and not without some satisfaction.

"Who is she and what is she to you?" I demanded.

"She is not what you suspect."

"Then tell me."

"Will you not trust me, and believe when I tell you that your suspicions are unfounded?"

"You speak of love and ask me to trust," I replied scornfully; "where is *your* trust and *your* confidence? I am but a woman, and as all women, I must know. We take nothing on trust when it comes to the loves of men."

He was silent.

"I am not a tattler," I pleaded.

"Would I have unmasked before you to-day had I thought you were?"

"'Tis a little thing I ask," I coaxed again, for it seemed that I must know this thing. "See, I do not question your disguise; also I trust you when you say that you are in no league with that demon to work me ill—I trust your word when all evidence is against you, and in spite of many fears. But, of the girl I *must* know."

"Would I could tell you!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Can you not understand that, loving you as I do, and desiring above all things your favor, I would gladly hold nothing from you. Were this secret mine how willingly would I confide in you! But I guard in honor that of another whose confidence it is not mine to give. Will you not trust me though I cannot tell you?"

"Let me not see nor hear of you again, sir!" I cried bitterly; "I will have no such lover!"

And turning without a backward glance, I left him standing, his arm pressed against the chestnut upon which I had myself so lately leaned for support.

CHAPTER XIV

SCHOOLMISTRESS-ELECT

Mr. Murray and I were sitting before the library grate, having just finished a chafing-dish feast of Welsh rarebit, one of my specialties. Of late he had called often; and we were now on a footing of easy friendship. It is hard to tell how dreary these days might have been for me had not his companionship brought at times a cheery beam of sunshine. For companionable he was,—and versatile, and it had never been my pleasure to know a more carefully trained mind than his. How often, as I sat listening to the luminous play of his intellect, did I compare him to those who had been my companions in that old frivolous life, wondering what I, too, might have made of my empty years had there been such as he to show me the folly of them.

The night was one of December's worst efforts. A penetrating drizzle, setting in at nightfall, had been fanned by a northeaster into a veritable blizzard. At every onslaught of the gale the shutters clattered a loud protest, receiving for answer a small fire of dead leaves, twigs, and sleet from the invading hosts of Boreas. Such a night it was as to freeze to the marrow all who ventured without.

But a night when a fire-warmed ingle, a book, or better still, a congenial friend, furnish to the contented mind all that life holds to desire.

My companion seemed troubled. For a time he sat near me in silence; then he went to stand by the window where a shutter had blown back, letting a track of fire glow out across the waste of night and tempest. I went over beside him.

Sermon-building?" I asked. "Or does the captive eagle beat his wings to be off in the storm?"

"Such battling of the elements makes me ever thoughtful, thoughtful and reverent before Him who holds these forces, and us, in the hollow of His hand."

"And on such nights as these I am not thoughtful nor reverent, but contented and happy," I answered him.

"Is not happiness but the offering up of our concerted powers in one harmonious song of gratitude to Him who made us to be happy? Is it not an unconscious response to that divine intention begun in our first parents and thwarted by their deliberate disobedience?"

"How much of our pleasure or sorrow in life comes through comparisons?" he observed after a silence between us. "For instance, how inviting seems this fireside after a glimpse out into this night! And what would it mean, think you, to a

belated traveler lost in the tempest and darkness to be hailed hither and sheltered for the night? There are many such out in this very storm. It is thinking of them that alloys the otherwise perfect content that I feel on such an evening."

How little he knew that as he spoke thus, and at every blast of the gale, there passed along my heart's tendrils a shiver as I thought of him who endured, for the sake of a secret duty the martyrdom of exile there on that bleak mountain! But I answered carelessly:

"You should not think so much, old grave-digger; you should learn my secret. When I close yon door on the night, I close it likewise on the world and its woes. Must I chase about the burden of another's misery, when God has given me comfort? These are gifts from His hand."

"You cannot close your doors on the sorrows of your kind," he replied earnestly. "Pain and pleasure go ever hand in hand. This is the common lot, and we bear it in common for we are members of a brotherhood. Can we think of the misery, the degradation of lives less favored than ours; can we listen to the cry of the mother as she clasps a small cold form to her heart; can we watch the shivering child whose hand is outstretched to us for food,—can we, able to help or to comfort, turn from them to our selfish pleasures? The true enjoyment of wealth lies only in its proper use,—the alleviation of the universal woe, the ele-

vation of the race. In such works alone is man to find the door to happiness. Do you not know that the universal law of nature is service? The plant offers up its life for man or beast or for the fertilization of the soil; the lives of the creatures make up one ceaseless sacrifice for man; and man, too, must give of his best to others, imitating the perfect example of Him who pleased not himself."

"Then if one man serves, another must be the recipient of that service and rest in the enjoyment of it," I replied. "Such is my fate; because of the labors of those now gone I rest secure from even a thought of care."

"Ah, there you err!" said my companion. "Their service is yours only in transition. It stops to bless you on its flight down the generations, trusting to you to fulfill your part in its wider dissemination. We cannot live unto ourselves; we are, whether we wish it or no, bundles of influence for good or for ill. We scatter, as we tread life's pathway, the straws from that bundle; words, spoken or withheld; deeds of service or of selfishness; examples, worthy of emulation, or unpraiseworthy; and those subconscious operations of mind and spirit over the minds and spirits of those about us. Life is, then, a loan from our Maker to be returned with usury."

"Then I fear I am a failure," said I, "for my life has returned no dividends."

"Miss Grigsby,"—Mr. Murray, who had

while speaking walked up and down the library floor, now stopped facing me—"you are capable of a fuller life than you now live. God lays not his plans carelessly; His hand has guided you here, and though you may refuse to see it, He calls you to service."

"Me? Pray what can I do?" I threw myself playfully into a chair by the table and took up a pen. "Is it a check? 'T is easy enough,—a scratch of the pen with no fear of a stint in consequence."

My companion sat down beside me, and took the hand on which two jewels flashed their cold luster. I withdrew it quickly. That cold hand with its colder glitter of gems, seemed an incongruity in the warm, human clasp of the minister. I fell to twisting the gleaming turquoise and diamond around into my palm well out of sight.

"Are you capable of a sacrifice?" he asked after a pause.

"I know not what that is," I answered, trying hard to conceal my eagerness.

"It is a sacrifice of time and ease; it is a burden of responsibility—a heavy one. Will you teach the village school?"

"Good Gracious!" I sprang to my feet, and stood glaring at him.

"Will you?" he repeated.

"Do I look as though I needed a job?"

"Yes."

"Indeed!" There was a swish of silken skirts; it had now come my turn to tread the polished floor of the library.

"I do not wonder at your consternation," he said. "I should not have come to you to-night did I not know you better than you seem to know yourself—no, wait till I explain—" (for I had begun a violent protest). "The school is in a dire strait. Already two months have passed, and three teachers have, in turn, undertaken and failed to bring order out of chaos. The first teacher, a child of eighteen, was taken from the ranks of last year's incorrigibles, and consequently recognized by her one-time co-workers of mischief to be no better than they. In her second week she was barred out of the building because of the interception and perusal of certain love notes, the writing of such being an art perfected by herself during last year's term. She went home that morning in hysterics which the Lord overruled wisely to terminate in nervous prostration. Teacher number two came from nowhere in particular with no recommendation, and left in a fortnight bearing less than none with her. The third was a young fellow from the University whose health, failing at college, he thought to recuperate by a tussle with village genius. The tussle resulted disastrously for him, however, for he now lies ill with fever.

"The directors are in despair; they declare that no teacher can be found to undertake the school,

which, I fear, suffers from an undeservedly harsh reputation. The children are by no means wholly at fault. Many of them are quick-witted, eager to learn, and faithful, but they are victims of a sadly defective school system. The school appropriations are not sufficient,—and this in a thriving district,—to induce competent teachers, who have spent time and money in preparation, to offer their services. Consequently, the work devolves on those who either work for extra pin money, or as a stepping-stone to better things.

“Then, every year comes a new teacher with a different degree of intelligence, and different methods of work. Often new text-books are introduced; and thus it results that, in the short five or six months’ session, the children lose so much time in the initiation into new books and methods, and in learning to know their teacher, that the close of school finds them scarcely settled into their groove of study. But there are other disadvantages:

“The tots must trudge, many of them, long distances over incomprehensibly ill-kept roads, through days or weeks of fearful weather. Often they are insufficiently clad and are allowed by ignorant parents to cough and snuffle throughout the winter with ‘nothing but a cold’. But the greatest enemy which the school system in this district has to face is the indifference of the parents themselves to the crying needs of education.

Their action in the matter is simply disgusting! The children are allowed to stop at home for any and every trivial reason: the need of a clean garment, when the mother may have spent the whole previous day in gossip with a neighbor; a fancied dislike for the teacher on the part of the child; a fancied neglect of the child on the part of the teacher; errands that the child must run for the mother; even, in many cases, because the child simply does not wish to go, or does not rise from bed in time. Further than the ability to 'read, write, and figger', the object of education is lost with these narrow-minded creatures. What use to preach to them of the soul uplift, of the larger grasp on life, its blessings, its responsibilities! They should be forced by law to see that their offspring are placed under thorough school training in order that they may grow into such men and women as our country districts need. Until then, I see little hope for the country."

"And you believe me equal to this?" I asked, pleased that he so trusted me.

"I do."

"And if I join the ranks as teacher number four, will the minister offer himself as number five?"

"There is to be a number four and no more," he replied, smiling.

"And what remuneration am I to expect?"

"Twenty—possibly twenty-five—dollars per month."

"And hours—"

"9 A. M. to 4 P. M."

"And number of pupils?"

"Twenty to forty, ranging in years from six to twenty."

"Do I appear to equal your sum total of required powers?"

"I stake you against the three."

"And why, may I ask, do you assume this responsibility?"

"The directors, who seem indifferent, threatened to close the school: I thought of you, and besought a respite."

"You surely have not mentioned my name in connection with this thing?" I turned on him fiercely.

"I am not such a diplomat as that," he answered, smiling again at my unfeigned distress.

"Perhaps you might now have felt an added obligation had I already implicated you."

For a while I walked the floor in silence. Then I took a stand by the open shutter and made certain mental observations: how delightful to think of,—a tramp to a cold, leaky schoolhouse through such a tempest, with a dinner-pail snack at twelve, instead of Aunt Judy's delectable lunch at one-thirty! What of that nap at two, which to forego seemed almost to desecrate some ancient, inviolable edict? What of the all-day rambles? The wind gave an agonizing howl as it fled around

the corner of the old mansion. The bare, soggy arms of a poplar, struck by the blast, shivered across the track of light from the open shutter as the giant bowed beneath the burden of winter. A sparrow, dislodged by a gust of wind and attracted by the friendly glow, drove its bewildered wings against the pane just above my head and fell, stunned, upon the veranda.

Mr. Murray came over to me, and raising the sash, rescued the small, resistless creature, warming it in his palm: "Poor wee thing!" he mused. "Groping for light and misguided!"

I stood silent, while over and over those words addressed me: "groping for light—groping for light, and misguided!"

"Mr. Murray," I said at length, and my voice must have suggested some encouragement, for he turned to me eagerly, "tell me truly why you think me capable of this?"

"My reasons are many and well founded. In the first place, to me you confess, by your act of leaving a gay life to settle here, a desire for something more soul-satisfying, more congenial to one of your intellectuality. Then, you are a college graduate, one who must have high ideals of life, and a desire for the uplift of humanity. These ideals you will impart by unconscious influence to the young and impressionable minds about you, with far-reaching results. You have no duties, and duties you should have. Then, and best of

all, you have personal magnetism, tact, a love of Nature, and 'a way with children'. I have watched how they already love you."

"That is because I love them. Untutored in the arts of grown-ups, I find in them that simplicity, that trust and guileless love, for which my soul longs. They do not seem to me as mortals, but angels just from the hand of God and 'trailing clouds of glory' as they come."

"I thought," he said, "that you might help them, might show them something better than they know."

"I know I ought!" I cried. "I am an anchorless ship drifting to no purpose! I need duties! But oh, sir! I am not what you think me; you do not know me—my past—" I faltered.

He took both my hands in his and bent over me.

"I know more than you believe of your past, and I know that you can and you will. I trust you to answer the call of your higher nature,—I trust you because I—"

I sprang to my feet for there was a light in his eyes that was unmistakable.

"Leave me now," I entreated. "I will think it over to-night and to-morrow; after that you shall have your answer, and, Mr. Murray—I thank you."

Then he, stooping suddenly, pressed his lips to my hand and was gone.

Outside was the moaning of wind, the swish of intermingled rain and sleet, and the world with its millions of creatures: some sheltered, care-free as was I; others, cold, hungry, dying, some of whom my hand, outstretched in time, might have comforted or saved. Could I afford to sit thus, my talents hidden under the thick-lined bushel of selfishness, when duty called in tones that were clarion? Had I ever helped a soul in actual hand or heart service? Had I not rather hindered? At this thought a band gripped my throat, and I threw myself upon my knees by the arm-chair, and prayed my first genuine prayer for months—a prayer for forgiveness, for strength, for an open vision of that highway into the joyful fields of service and self-sacrifice. Above me the calm, sweet faces on the wall looked down from out the years approvingly. Their prayers were answered: the last of the Grigsbys would henceforth be worthy of a noble ancestry.

I rose with a great peace in my heart. My mind was resolved: I would teach the village school.

I turned to the open shutter to make it secure for the night, but instantly stood transfixed with astonishment. There outside the window in the path of light, a face was silhouetted on the black canvas of night. It disappeared instantly; but I knew from her heavy hair that my midnight visitor was the dumb girl from off the mountain.

Going to the window, I raised the sash and called: "You poor child, come in to the fire!" There was no response and I saw nobody. Hurrying out on the veranda with a lighted candle, I searched carefully about; no one was there. Regardless of rain and tempest I even went round the house toward the river, and called her. The swish of the dripping boughs and the sob of the storm-wind answered me. She was gone.

CHAPTER XV

I TASTE THE JOYS OF SERVICE

"Miss Patsy?" Dilly's feather duster bobbed in and out at random among the chair rounds, transferring certain scattered fragments of dust from unobtrusive and inoffensive positions to points of vantage about my person and over the tray of tea and toast from which I struggled to make an unwilling breakfast. It had long since been forced upon me that Aunt Judy permitted no fasting; and the sooner the inevitable was accepted and got through with, the better.

"Dilly, can't the dusting wait?" I asked, attempting the difficult feat of sneezing and simultaneously swallowing at a conglomeration of dust and He-No.

"'Ise jes' redden' up a little, Miss Patsy; aint gwine sweep—Miss Patsy, you aint loss yo' money, is you?"

"What?" I gasped.

"Miss Williams 'lows you gwine teach dem young heathents down dyar in Purgatory."

"Goodness, Dilly—where?"

"In Purgatory; dats de schoolhouse down dyar furninst de ribber." (And only last night I had heard it myself!)

"Where on earth did she get her information?"

"She step ober dis mornin' bringin' a quart can, an' ax fur a sprinkle o' salt; den she sot de endurin' mornin', her yearn fyar cocked fur enlightenment. She shore 'lectrify me by 'nouncin' dat meh little Missis done loss all her money, an' *had obliged* ter teck ter teachin'—'lowed it might meck you more neighborly. Dat critter shore am a sadger—common ez jimpson weed! dey aint no more refinery in dat greaser den dat long-snouted, razzor-back, brinnel shoat o' Uncle Isham's long-side o' yo' white Pole an' Chiney!"

Could the minister have betrayed me? Impossible! Yet it troubled me for so much as a doubt to come between us; so, with my usual eagerness to get at the fountain-head of mischief, I soon found myself knocking at the door of my good neighbor.

She was not at home, having gone to the village for supplies. The children, long ago won over by ice cream and candy treats, crowded about me. They said little but did much: they fondled my umbrella and watch chain; they rubbed down my skirt many times with admiring, greasy fingers; one boy climbed the back of the chair and stroked the *breast* on my turban affectionately; one girl donated a leaf from a sickly geranium on the window; while the baby but one came toddling with a sore-eyed, wheezy kitten whose patient resigna-

tion to martyrdom was worthy of a saintship, and offered the battered remnant upon my lap.

Soon a loud wail rose from the yard, whither the baby had betaken himself unnoticed by little Susie, the oldest and his nurse. Ere she could gain the door, however, the mother came in, the squealing youngster under one arm, her parcels strewing a path to the gate from under the other. Dropping bundles and baby, she made a dive at Susie. The child dodged, but not in time, and received a stinging blow on her cheek. Her eyes filled with tears; but she cowered in a silence born of long necessity before the offended parent.

"Haven't I done told you to keep that child out of them currant bushes! Readin' some fool book, I 'll be bound, you lazy,—"

"Good morning, neighbor!" I said, rising from a corner behind the stove.

"Land Sakes, Miss Grigsby! How delighted I am! Been waitin' long? Susie dear, rest the lady's wraps,—dear me! these children is sights, and brand-clean aprons on this mornin'! Jim, put them rough-dried clothes on the bed and give the lady the rocking-chair. I stepped over a minute this mornin' and the niggers said you was sick—better? Hush, hush, pet lamb!" she coaxed the youngest, hastening to administer the consolation usual in such extremities.

"Mrs. Williams," I began as soon as the din ceased, "Dilly told me that on your word I am to

teach the village school; I came to ask the source of your information."

"Dilly 's storying, Miss Grigsby! You can't believe one word a nigger says. I aint breathed such a thing—what 's a rich woman need to bother with a passle of young hyenas like them for?"

"Now, Mammy!" chimed Jim and Susie.

"Hush, gal!" Jim was the eldest and a boy, hence above reproach.

"But I am," I said quietly.

"I knowed it—I knowed it!" she exclaimed exultantly; "aint I done told Mrs. Jones the minister had you in mind!"

"Oh, Mammy, please let me go!" pleaded Susie. "I want to study so I can be a school-teacher!"

"No, you aint goin' a step, so just shut up! You've got too much foolishness about you now,—anyhow, I can't spare you with all the work, and baby that fretful!"

I looked at the sallow little face, on which the canker, care, had already begun its devastation; my heart was touched with pity for this misunderstood child, and burned with indignation against this monstrosity of a mother.

"Yes, Susie *is* going," said I, beckoning the sobbing child to me, and putting my arm about the little figure already bowed down by the burden of unremitting baby-tending. "Have you no ambition for your child, Mrs. Williams? If she

desires something better for herself than a life of drudgery, is her mother the person to hinder her?"

"I don't see the use in it, that 's all. None of that stuff helps her to cook and sew and clean, and as to teachin'—that 's bosh! She 'll marry like I did—then where 's the teachin'?"

"A school of six isn't to be despised."

"You aint never had no children! Talk about a mother raisin' a gang like mine and teachin' 'em too!"

"Wouldn't you be proud of Susie at the close of school if she came out ahead and you saw her marching up for her prize? I have often heard that a mother's proudest moment is when her child attains first merit over all competitors, and steps out to the admiring gaze of friends."

"And dressed in white with pink ribbons and flowers in her hair,—tell you what, Susie, I 'll nurse up that geranium and pinch back the buds and let it bloom out in March. Scarlet and pink aint a bad combination when flowers is scarce, is it, Miss Grigsby?"

"Lovely!" I exclaimed, charmed that I had at last touched the vulnerable spot. "So you 'll let her go?"

"Well, I guess I can manage somehow if I have to neglect the young ones some," she said, heaving a sigh. I looked about upon the besmeared and be-tousled brood, considering what further neglect

might be able to accomplish. But the minister was not yet vindicated.

"Your powers of discernment are prodigious, Mrs. Williams! Not a soul has heard of this from me. Where did you get your information?"

"*I am* out of the ordinary discernin', folks say," she avowed proudly. "When Mrs. Jones told me that Mr. Murray told the board he had someone in view, I said to her he meant you, because he wouldn't be trampin' through that wilderness so often for nothin'. She said maybe he was courtin' you." Her accents bristled with interrogation, and scenting danger ahead, I rose and fled ignominiously. I had scored two points, however; my friend had not deceived me; and Susie would go to school. I thought of the shriveled arms that had clung to me, and the tear-stained face that had rested for a short five minutes out of a loveless life in a new sense of sympathy and peace upon my shoulder; and, as I trudged home through mud ankle-deep, the way seemed strewn with flowers.

On Monday morning, one hour earlier than her wont, Dilly, previously instructed, wakened me. I groaned and shifted my position slightly. How soft was the bed, and how sweet was sleep at seven-thirty A. M., when energetic ones had been long abroad! For some minutes a war waged. Then, having put to flight the tempter who urged

the sending of a note pleading indisposition, I got up, dressed, and surveyed myself in the mirror. My costume of blouse, short walking-skirt and gaiters so exaggerated my diminutiveness that I called to Dilly to bring my longest and severest skirt. Whereupon that lady, much disgusted at being compelled to assist at the toilet of a school m'am, flung a cobwebby creation of gray crepe, chiffon and lace upon the bed, expressed some opinion of "preachers whar meddles in 'fairs day aint got no Scriptur fur," and fled into her room, slamming the door with such violence that a mirror fell from my hand and shivered to atoms.

Seizing the moment alone, I got together the fragments and hid them, knowing that, were Dilly to see that broken mirror, she would at once make arrangements for my funeral. Then I hung the reception gown back in the wardrobe, and opened Dilly's door cautiously.

"What 's all this commotion about, girl?"

She sobbed busily for a minute while I stood by waiting the ebb tide. Then she opened up her storehouse of grievances:

"Ise scandalized, dat what I is! Is you gone clean crazy, Miss, or is you jes' conjured?"

"You are free to go when you wish, Dilly," I said, dolefully.

"I jes' knowed you was wearied ob me—I jes' knowed it!"

"Now Dilly—"

"I knows Ise nebber bin cable o' given you satisfactionment, howsomebber I done try—!" Loud blubberings checked further utterance.

"Dilly, haven't we been chums from childhood?"

"Deed we has, Miss!"

"Have I ever wanted to be rid of you?"

"If you is you aint signify it."

"Then why think so now?"

"Kayse if you resigns bein' a lady you kyarnt keep no lady's maid to mind you."

"Can't a lady be a teacher?"

"Yass'm; but a teacher kyarnt be no soft-skinned—"

"—idle, good-for-nothing!" I finished. "That she can't!"

"I aint meanin' dat; youse powerful 'dustrious—youse busy projekin' de endurin' day."

"What at?"

"I aint paid ter spy on de doin's o' meh little Missis."

"Then I 'll tell you; I 've led the life of a humming-bird, as useless—"

"Hummin'-birds aint useless; dey sings—"

"Sings!"

"Yass'm, an' sucks de honey—"

"That 's just it! I 've done nothing but suck honey."

"Dey 's more 'n one I done seen whar act like

dey got de 'pinion youse de honey 'sted o' de bird."

I now made for the door—she would soon have the best of me.

"Dey 's folks as might say youse more like another fowl I knows den a hummer."

"What, a goose?"

"No'm, a chicken."

"Am I so noisy?"

"Youse so powerful enticin' ter de clergy, an' so powerful easy ter be took in, moreober."

I passed quickly down to my breakfast; and out into the morning. And what a morning it was! How clear, cold, and crisp! The hoarfrost lay thick over the brown earth-bosom, and glittered along weed-stems and tree-branches. The Sun, just over the eastern wall, sent his shafts to check the further incursions of the Frost King; and my blood leaped up to meet his fire. Then joy, hope, and the never-failing assurance of youth came bounding along that red-river current, and my brain sounded a clear response to the call of Duty. My walk lay out through the Jungle, down the road to the river, then some half-mile on to the right, and was an easy one when roads and skies were favorable.

On reaching the school I found a motley throng gathered about the door and being entertained by a dispute in which four large boys participated. The contention was found to be as to whose duty

it now fell to make the fire in the schoolhouse stove. Heretofore the difficulty had been arranged by these four boys taking week-about turns; but matters had been complicated by the two weeks' holiday, the question being whether the two boys whose time of duty fell on these weeks were thereby absolved from present obligation.

The contest waged long and loud, and promised livelier action. Meanwhile the stove waited in cold and sooty indifference, and the small children, many of them without wraps and barefoot, shivered in the feeble rays of the sun. Dispatching one of the belligerents in quest of an axe, with directions as to its use, I invited all of the tots who would to help, and set about collecting woodpile gleanings, the three contestants looking on in stubborn unconcern. The woodbox was soon overflowing with chips and dry wood; then, with the aid of an old copybook, some kerosene from a bracket lamp, and a match provided by myself, the room was soon filled to suffocation with smoke from the cold, damp flue. The children, crowding about the stove, seemed used to such exhibitions of ill-temper; but I was not, and my weeping elicited much interest.

When the smoke had sufficiently cleared to render the children visible, I hung my hat behind the blackboard, and rang the bell on the pine table.

Pushing and fighting, the children shuffled into the four long benches that faced on either side of

two tables, running lengthwise from the recitation bench in front almost to the door in the rear. There seemed to be some trouble as to satisfactory arrangement; and from the way certain great youths fell into vacant seats beside giggling girls, the game seemed to be not wholly one of chance. It took little time to rout the whole lot, and rearrange them to suit myself rather than themselves.

After this came a short service,—Scripture reading, a song which proved to be a solo, and a prayer, during which there was a rapid fire of carefully prepared missiles, with much shuffling and tittering.

Then came the roll which I thought to arrange in alphabetical order, discovering thereby that there was much yet to be learned.

“Will all the A’s come forward to the desk?”

One small girl rose nervously, but was jerked back by her plait: “Your name begins with W, silly.”

“I know better; don’t ‘Annie’ begin with A?” A fearful din ensued, to subdue which the bell was rung loudly.

“Well, let the B’s come forward.”

After much delay five boys and two girls came up.

“Come back, Bunk!” yelled a chorus; “you aint a B.”

"What 's your name, little girl?" I coaxed, putting my arm around the smaller one.

There was no response.

"Tell me, dear. I want to write your name first on this big paper—see?"

"Carrie," came in the faintest breath of a whisper.

"Carrie what?"

She tugged at the brown apron that came to her ankle.

"What's your papa's name?"

"Jim."

"Her pa's name is Jim Dixon," interrupted the larger girl. "She came up 'cause I did; her ma said she must stay with me."

"O, yes—and your name?"

"Mary Agnes Burks."

At last I had a name.

"Her name aint Burks," screamed a voice from the rear. "Her step-pa 's named 'Burks', she 's a Smith."

"Ma said I could write my name 'Burks' 'cause it would sound uncommoner to teacher," announced Mary Agnes.

"Well?" I looked at the largest boy.

"James Garfield Brown," he answered proudly.

"Good! And yours?"

"Abraham Lincoln Brown."

"And yours?"

"John Brown."

I moved uneasily, for I had deep-seated convictions as to what Virginia politics should be, and like not to have my convictions disturbed.

"And yours?" to the next.

"Billy."

A loud titter arose. The boy blushed but said nothing.

"What is it?"

"Billy Buhl."

"What a high-sounding name!" I said in real earnest. "The leading physician of our city has that same name."

"He is my father's cousin," said Billy.

"Really?" I looked the boy over. He was a fine specimen, though painfully self-conscious and awkward. "You 'll be a leading man some day somewhere, Billy, I am sure of that," I said warmly.

He ducked his head, but I saw by a glance from his eye that Billy had forgotten the jeers of his schoolmates, and had become from now on my champion.

A hand now waved above a small red head.

"Our teachers don't never take the roll that way; they begins at the littlest and ends at the biggest."

That this was wisdom born of experience was not to be denied. However, it was not for me to confess defeat to a diminutive red-head; so, taking the paper in hand, I went up and down the

lines taking the names consecutively. Next I called up the primer class, and found my troubles but just begun. These children ranged from six to twelve years; some were bright, some stupid; some had one style of primer, some another; some had none. In disgust I ordered the books closed, and turning to the board, printed the letter U on it.

"What's this, Mary?"

Silence.

"What is it, Gertie?"

Several hands went up.

"What is it, Sam?"

"That 's 'me'," answered Sam.

That Sam should have been selected to give the name of that letter I soon found to be unfortunate in the extreme; for this the children had scarcely dared to hope, and in the din which ensued I rang the bell many times in vain.

"That 's U, Sammy—the letter U; repeat it."

"Me," repeated Sammy.

A large girl waved her hand. "Please, teacher, Sammy 's been to school six months and aint never learned U yet."

The child looked up at me through streaming eyes.

"If you whips me like they all do, I 'll run off sure!"

"You poor little fellow!" I said patting his

head. "You 'll get it yet, and I 'll not whip you, either; all of us say 'me' much too often."

I now sketched with poor skill the picture of a cat on the board, and underneath printed the name in large letters.

"What 's this, Mary?"

The child giggled and screwed about in her seat.

"Well, John?"

"It 's a animal."

"Yes, but what kind?"

"That thing aint got no name."

"I know," burst from Mary, "It 's a painter!"

"Taint! it 's a polecat."

"It 's a *cat*, and this word spells 'cat',—look at it well."

"That aint no cat," whispered a chubby boy with no shoes and stockings, but many freckles; "it 's just the picture of a cat and a pesky poor one, too."

After more time thus wasted, I sent the class out in the yard. My head began to whirl, and I to wonder at the endurance that had kept those three teachers two weeks each in this place of horrors.

"Teacher," called a gaudily dressed miss, "aint the fire gone out?"

"Teacher, may I get a drink?" called another.

I worked heroically through the day to make up the classes, but the task was stupendous. There

were constant and repeated requests to leave the room, which, I soon learned, meant much hobnobbing outside; there was much talking aloud, tittering, pushing, and quarreling; notes, dead bugs, apple cores and other articles of commerce were constantly moving at rapid transit hither and thither and yon along or across or against the lines of bobbing heads; in order that he recognize my authority, one boy was dragged by the ear to a conspicuous corner, to stand with his head to the wall for one hour; one stood upon the table for the same length of time; two heads, bowed over a game of tit-tat-toe, I rubbed together vigorously; one girl of sixteen, from whom I collected four notes from her several admirers, was sent from the room for impertinence; once a mouse manœuvred my way to the amusement of all but myself; and once a pig, prying open the door, inserted his snout and grunted a friendly greeting, to which the children responded in chorus.

At last, having formed a Spelling class, and classes in Geography, Arithmetic, Grammar, and History, I drilled them for ten minutes in calisthenics, much to their delight; interested them in a scheme to raise money for the building of a partition to separate the tots from the older pupils; offered rewards for punctuality, for good behavior, and for the highest average; invited the largest and most unruly of them to my home on the following evening, and dismissed them.

Tired I was, but courageous, for the day had not been without its consolations. Among this boisterous throng were children of unusual intelligence and aptitude. Many bright faces turned to mine eagerly. What of my opportunity to mould these pliable little lives? Was there ignorance, was there lawlessness? Then how much greater the need! Could I but teach them to love me, and thus gain their willing obedience, the way would be easy. At least it was worth the effort.

And well it was for me that Heaven's benediction of work fell on me now, else I might not have been spared to speak sanely of that which was to follow.

CHAPTER XVI

UNCLE ISHAM SHOWS THE PALE FEATHER

"Has you ebber tended de circus, Missis?" Uncle Isham was busily engaged raking dead leaves into huge piles on the terrace, while I, lolling in the broad hammock, looked on disapprovingly. It had always seemed a desecration to me to deal thus rudely with corpses.

Having been answered in the negative, he began wit unusual deliberation to remove the débris from his rake, and continued:

"Dat 's mighty kuse, galivantin' much ez you has. Toby shore I only goes ter see de critters; I aint sot no store by dem circut riders an' wimmen whar outgrewed dey custumes. Aint dem lepperds an' rhinocerers an' hitterpotamers skeery lookin' varmints howsomebber?"

"Your grandfather lived where those animals run at large; did you know that?"

"Dat whar I livin' now, an' dat what pester me, an' dat what meck I ax what I does. Is you hearn o' de lepperd up on de mountain back o' Hell Gate?"

"I never hear such stuff," I replied warmly.

"Dey shore am a lepperd on dat mountain; an' dey say, moreober, dat de Sang Digger keepin' 'im

hid away dyar. No right-min' man gwine up dyar in dat unransed place ter fin' 'im; but dey say ez how he's bin seed prowlin' long de ribber an' up to'wds dis place. Ise kinder scared ter bum 'round dese nights mehsself."

The truth dawned on me suddenly; and, though my cheeks began to burn and my heart to thump, this ridiculous solution threw me upon a pile of leaves in a fit of laughter. Uncle Isham, much offended, went off to rake under a distant oak.

"Come back, Uncle!" I called. "I want to hear more of that leopard."

"Taint no use goin' inter dysterics ez I kin see," grunted the old man, edging back. "If you 'd seed one o' dem critters once, you 'd understand' de gravitation o' de circumstance!"

"O Uncle!" I choked; "you mean the girl—the Sang Digger's daughter."

"Youse got de truf a little crazy-quilted, Miss; de gal's de one whar got de lepperd, herself; an' she mus' take de varmint wid her, kayse dey kyarnt 'proach her long o' fearin' dat lepperd—dat what dey tells me."

"They mean the leprosy—a dreadful disease, worse than ten leopards. 'Leper' and 'leopard' sound much alike, you know, Uncle."

"Youse doubtedly right, Missis; howsomebber, I leans ter de beast side o' de arg'ment—one o'

dem critters mortalized by de Holy Scriptor regardin' dey spots."

"I would not listen to idle gossip, Uncle. There is no leopard on that mountain; and, though the girl is no doubt ill, she has no more leprosy than *I* have, for I have seen her, myself, more than once."

"You has!—fo' Gord!" The rake fell to the ground, while his never-idle arms hung limp at his side. "Dat 's jes' what dey say, an' I done meh bes' ter conflute de statement. Dey say youse kahutin' wid de Sang Digger, an' dey gwine look inter de matter. Jim Williams publish it dat you holes candessant meetin's wid 'im; an' some oder leaky mouf say he sneaks round yer wid he wild-cat singin'. He aint nebber discommode me, I tells 'em; an' I ax 'em why don' dey ax de Missis bein' ez she fyar reakin' wid knowledge. Miss Patsy, dem sadgers treat dat ole man scan'lous! dey aint gun 'im no prowishons at de stores fur two weeks—dey 's cottened 'm."

"What?" I asked, smiling in spite of a heavy heart.

"Dat 's jes' like I got it,—de boys cottened 'im."

"Then aren't they in need of food?"

"Dey aint grievin', Miss," said Uncle Isham with evident satisfaction. "Does you reckerleck 'Lijah', an' dem black birds whar brung 'im he vittals?" He leaned on his rake in silence, await-

ing the ebullition of my curiosity. He had not long to wait.

"Do you mean that—?"

"I means dat de ravens aint all dead yit, Missis," he chuckled.

"You blessed old creature! How did you manage it?"

"I aint manage it since Jim done tell me dat tale 'bout de lepperd; but I done fetch 'im apples an' milk an' Judy's jam an' truck de hull endurin' fall—not ober de ribber, min' you—I aint temptin' o' Proverdence dat fur—I jes' gib 'im de wud not ter pass dat hollow cottenwood widout retchin' up ter de shelf whar I done fix in de bosom o' dat tree—"

"And you accepted pay of him?" I asked eagerly.

Uncle Isham drew his gnarled figure up to what approximated to straightness, and I saw that a grave insult had been unwittingly offered.

"I thought perhaps he would insist," I hastened to explain.

"If you 'magine yo' ole Isham done forgot he raisin', bettah turn 'im loose ter graze wid de sadgers! He gimme *one* stroke ter de fambly pride, but *dat stroke war all*, Miss! One day he lef' a bran-new dollar bill in dat tree. Den I lays in waitin'; an' when he come, I han 'im de chink, an' sez in meh importantest tone: 'Mister Sang Digger, I 'scuses you fur not designatin' de lone



“ ‘ De ravens ain’t all dead yit, Missis! ’ ”

cauliflower 'mongst de field o' cabbages; an' mebbe you aint knowed it long o' seein' so many half strainers, but de cream of Firginy quality aint usen ter ax no pay fur de cup o' cole water; an' if you want ter do meh lil'l Missis a favor don' ax her ole Isham ter bring shame an' infusion on de name o' Grigsby.' Den he ax who meh lil'l Missis? An' I tells 'im: 'Miss Patsy—she whar has de hull wurl o' men at her feet an' kyarnt fin' one good 'nouf ter tromple on.' 'She mus' be mos' uncommon sweet an' lovely,' he meck answer, takin' de money I holes out ter 'im, an' he eye twinklin'; 'but will she an' yo' conshunce 'low you de 'ception ob a gift?' 'I aint got no figgers on dat mattah,' sez I. An' you b'lieve me! 'Bout a week arter dat dis nigger fin' a gole watch an' chain in dat tree dat I tuck home an' Judy hid on de jyce kayse she say dat much pure gole on an ole black nigger reek too strong o' de lock-up."

"But what has he done for provisions since the boycott?"

"Onct a week on de Friday night at six o'clock he come ter de tree an' gimme money an' de name o' he needcessities; den I meck de purchase in de name o' meh lil'l Missis."

"Good for you! When you go to-night let me know—I will send some bread."

"Dat what pester me, Miss. I kyarnt go."

"I thought you decided not to believe that nonsense about the leopard," I answered warmly.

"'Taint dat, Miss, 'pon de wud o' meh honor! Ise got a tetch o' de rumatics, an' de night air nusses up dat misery scan'lous. Moreober, Judy done gimme meh orders dat she aint gwine iron cloes all day an' spen' de hours o' res' ironin' meh ole stiff jints."

"'Twould be a shame to let them suffer through an idle tale; I 'll go with you if that will help you."

"Rumatics aint no idle tale, Miss; an' how come you goin' gwine keep off de night air?"

"You were in the village until ten last night—I fail to see the difference. You 're afraid of that leopard, that 's what!" I said scornfully.

He looked at me thoughtfully a moment, then the truth came out.

"Does you want dem sadgers ter tar an' felder me, or run me outen yo' service by de use o' mortified eggs?"

I looked at my watch. It was now four o'clock and no time was to be lost. Stealing into the pantry I packed a basket with what groceries and provisions were to be found, and slipped off through the barnyard to the river. Could I but gain the cottonwood and deposit the load unobserved! I looked carefully up, down, and across the river, but saw no one. Then, hastening, I fulfilled my errand; and, having pinned to a loaf of bread a note purporting to be Uncle Isham's, in which I requested that Mr. Sang Digger make his

further needs known by writing, I turned—to meet the gaze of Mr. Lovelace, who, undisguised, had crossed the river and drawn up to shore while business was in progress inside the tree.

In an instant he was before me, completely blocking the path. Then he spoke in a voice well-nigh choked by emotion:

“I can never thank you enough for this—for your kindness of which I am unworthy.” He would have taken my hand but I drew myself back proudly.

“Spare your thanks for him to whom they are due. I am but an unwilling deputy.” I made to pass him, but, when he hindered me, I turned to mount the hill at right angles to the path.

“Miss Grigsby,” he said, and his tone had in it I know not what, at which I stopped short to listen; “it is of utmost importance that I speak with you. Were it a matter that concerned myself, you should be spared the seeming insult of this detention; but it is for your sake alone that I am here. For three days now I have loitered up and down the river in hopes of seeing you, or of sending you a note by your servant. This meeting was not a chance one; I saw you from the opposite shore, and came, regardless of your wishes, to speak with you.”

I thought of the Goblin, and sat down on a log, shaken by a nameless dread. Then he began,

speaking with that calm that betokens the accustomed mastery of emotion :

“It is of a matter to which I referred vaguely at our last meeting that I must now speak more fully. There has been about of late an old man—he whom you met that day on the mountain—whom I judge to be the prey to an hallucination. Unfortunately this takes the form of a grudge against your house of which you are the surviving member. He would gladly harm you though you are innocent. Learning of his evil design on you, I have urged him to leave, but to no purpose. I have threatened him with the hand of the law, but still he slinks about, hiding away in some hole, the location of which is unknown to me. He hovers about the ravine that runs through your park, but I can find no caverns along its sides but are flooded by water. Since entreaty and threats avail nothing, I have taken measures to have him removed to a place of safety. But until that is effected, I beg of you that you either leave the place for a time, or else secure better protection than you now have. It has been for this reason that I have come to watch near you at night when I knew you scorned me for it. It has been to effect his departure that I have been seen in company with him in your ravine. Had I not thought to have been rid of him ere now, I would have told you this on that day in the wood; but I cared not to

mar, needlessly, the sweet contentment of your life."

He paused, looking off across the river. But I rose, my cheeks burning as I thought of the poor return I had given him, and of my cruel suspicions. I went to him, and held out my hand impulsively:

"It is I who am unworthy of you, Gogaphy," I said, my voice trembling. "I knew that you met him, and— forgive me—I thought that you two plotted for my inheritance; I thought this—because—" I faltered.

"Why did you think this?" he asked eagerly.

"—because you are my cousin, and this old man is your grandfather and my great-uncle."

It was like a spear-thrust. He looked at me in silence, while there was in his eye the piteous appeal of an innocent creature led to the slaughter. Then, having seized my hand, he held it in a pitiless grip that I felt not at the moment, but afterward found had crushed the flesh; after a time he asked with the outward calm at which I often wondered, "Have you proof of this, Miss Grigsby?"

"Whom think you this resembles?" I asked, drawing my locket from my waist and holding it out to him.

He looked at it; then, taking his mother's locket from his pocket, laid it beside the other. Almost immediately he exclaimed: "Wonderful!—the hair, the eyes, the mouth—they could be twins! Who is he?"

"Her cousin, and my father: and since the old man recognized your mother as his child, and claims relationship with me, is not this resemblance proved thereby to be more than an idle fancy?"

"Then it is true! My God, why was I born to this!" he cried, loosing my hand and burying his face on the arm that he rested against a tree, while his frame shook with a misery that pierced my soul.

"Gogaphy, my dear—Cousin," I faltered, "I know well why you suffer through this relationship. It reveals to you a closet in which lie hidden the bones of a grim skeleton. But this should not so distress you; that you have no dealings nor sympathy with him, I know right well. 'T was against my heart's promptings that I once doubted you."

"How could you have done else but doubt me, knowing of that cursed deed, and that I, his offspring, met with him, for what purpose you understood not! Believe me, I thought him insane; I refused to listen to his ravings; I knew nothing of that murder, and knew not that I had a relation on earth. But those faces prove that I, who have held honor and integrity so highly, am the offspring of a viper and—murderer."

The girl on the mountain was forgotten, while I thought of but one thing—for I am a woman: the man whom I loved, as I never thought to love

a man on earth, stood before me, and suffered, enduring in innocence that heritage of crime, the burden of which to him, with his noble views of life, was heavy indeed. My heart bled for him. I went over to him, and, pushing back the heavy hair that fell over the bowed head, addressed him gently:

"Look at me, dear," I said. "I can well see that there is none of him in you, for you have lived your life most worthily. It is for what you do, and not for what your fathers have done, that your account must be rendered; besides, you do not bear this alone; is it not my heritage of sorrow together with yours? Let us suffer it together."

Then he took me in his arms suddenly, and, holding me close, whispered:

"Oh, Patsy, my darling girl! if we must bear this burden together, give me the right to protect you! My love for you has become an agony. I cannot bear to be apart from you, not knowing what danger besets you. Will you not let my great love for you atone for that evil done to your house by mine? I know that you love me, Sweetheart, your eyes tell me this; but will you not trust me and commit your sweet life to my keeping? I am not so unworthy of you, dear."

How well his fine eyes and his proud and confident bearing spoke for him to me of those past years of struggle, in which he had conquered him-

self and the difficulties that beset him, and whereby he was now a conqueror of men!

"You are not 'Mayer of Mooretown,'" I said, smiling up into his face. "So, how am I to know that you are worthy?"

"All you need know at present is that I would die for you," he murmured, kissing my hair.

My arms went round his neck, for a sudden force seemed to be tearing me from him, while the ground reeled beneath me.

"Tell me one thing," I whispered, "and I will love you forever—who is she?"

He did not answer, but held me very close as though fearful of what was to follow.

"You will not tell me?"

"I would die for you, Sweetheart."

"Then, tell me."

"Can you not trust me in this thing also? Some day you will know all, but now I cannot tell you."

Then I did what women will sometimes do, to repent of in anguish, and years of unrelenting bitterness. I tore myself from him, and drew myself up proudly:

"You are a —hypocrite, and I—think—I—*hate* you."

"Patsy," he cried, as a soul in the bitterness of torture; "would you have me betray a friend, and impeach my honor?"

"Go!" I exclaimed fiercely, pointing to his boat.

"I will not go until you understand me!"

"Then *I* will," I said, turning.

"She—is—not—"

"She is not your sister, neither is she old; but she is a woman—go!" I cried, scarcely knowing what I said. Then I fled blindly down the river path through the gathering twilight.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DELIGHTS OF A RURAL WINTER

My friend Elisabeth was to pay me a visit. She was to arrive sometime during the first week in December, and I became anxious, for Elisabeth objects to perverse weather. Before she had announced her intention to come to see me, I had often rhapsodized to her on the perfection of Virginia weather. Now I said nothing, but thought much. I even did so rash a thing as to consult weather prognostications, and found to my delight that December was mostly to be a month of serenest calm; nothing more fearsome than "fair, with southeasterly winds" was to be expected. What, thought I, could give more delight to Elizabeth than a radiant December, with blue skies, blue hills, bluebirds deceived into song, and blue-blooded aristocrats coming to call!

On the morning of her arrival I rose early and looked out. All necessary preparations for a well-regulated mourning had been made during the night. A gray pall overspread the sky; and, searching along the eastern horizon, I found not the smallest rent in the close-woven veil. Even the mountains were hidden. Yesterday, they had gathered a thick veil about their bare shoulders;

now I knew that they, keenly sensitive as lofty natures always are, had felt the foreblast of the tempest. A penetrating wind blew steadily from the northeast. The few migratory birds that had lingered behind their fellows this mild autumn—postponing until necessity compelled the slipping away—had packed their trunks during the night and passed silently, shedding a tear, perhaps, on the thresholds of their now deserted homesteads. Shriveled leaves, stricken as an aged man, fell without complaint or useless clinging to naked twigs. Mingling his mottled brown with the scurrying leaves, a fluffy feather-ball tossed by on the wings of the whistling blast—he it was, the irrepressible sparrow. There was also a mournful procession of chickadees, snow-buntings, and finches,—ruffled, voiceless, drooping,—for in bird-dom, too, coming events cast their shadows before.

It has been more than two weeks since that day on which, draggled and chilled, her silk coat caked with mud, Elisabeth entered the portals of the Nunnery. Since then, the weather has behaved in somewhat the following manner: two days—rain, with piercing winds from the east; one day—balmy radiance of spring; two days—rain, sleet, snow, with winds veering to northeast, north, and west; three days—bitter cold with high winds; one day—snow; one day—

rain; one day—spring warmth, with skies of sapphire—a day of horror to pedestrians; three days—rain, sleet, snow blizzard, and freeze to the marrow of the the earth.

Elisabeth, whom I had never known intimately in the two years of our acquaintance, proved to be one of those rare creatures gifted with adaptability. Finding varying atmospheric conditions to be the rule here, she accepted them with that cheerfulness that sways the philosophic mind; she went further—she reveled in her isolation. When I moaned for her a dearth of beaux, she heaved a magnificent sigh of relief; she raved over the big fireplaces, the carved stairway, and the attic, teeming with musty relics; she insisted that she adored *rats*; she praised my household management, thereby endearing herself to me, who knew that her conceptions of my powers along this line were overdrawn.

But what I prized most in Elisabeth was her delicate intuition. Her spirit, sensitive as the down of the milkweed, responded, as with a gossamer touch, to mine; and thus were our hearts knit into closer sympathy. For Elisabeth it was who knew as none other why I hugged this life of loneliness; and who more than I, could see and not mock at those furrows that had lately traced their way across her white cheeks? Sometimes, when in bitterness of soul I lay face downward upon the hearth rug, weeping, she would enter

noiselessly, and as noiselessly retire. Then, when the cup had passed from me, she would take me in her arms, but not to peer into my swollen face, nor to question me.

Never once did I mention the name of Mr. Lovelace; neither did I speak of the dumb girl. To do the latter was not possible for me; and as for him—perhaps he had known her in that western city from which the Montagues had moved to mine but two years previously. Once—having heard some gossip, I presumed—she questioned me. With averted face I answered that, though it was true that these people lived on the mountain somewhere, I knew little of them, and advised her to steer clear of them likewise.

Not once in these weeks had I seen Mr. Lovelace, but my heart told me that he was still on the mountain; neither was I forgotten. Once a week there came from a florist in a neighboring city a box of exquisite flowers, the cost of which no man of small means could have afforded. There came, too, direct from the publishers, books, or music—always of the best; and though there was no proof as to their sender, how well I knew! and, as I hugged these messages from his heart to mine, and wept with joy, I knew that to him I had yielded the only and enduring love of a passionate, willful heart.

On the morning before Christmas Day we waked to find that fairy forces had been abroad

while we slept. Molten drops had been crystallized, polished, and shaped by the skillful frost-smith into ten thousand fairy palaces. No tree but reared its head, transformed in a single night from a tenantless tenement into a crystal palace, along whose gleaming corridors stalked the frost king; not a humble weed but flaunted a diamond coronet; the clothes-lines presented a whole regiment of brightly polished bayonets, ready against the onslaught of the day king; even Aunt Judy's turkeys, that roosted in the trees, wore brilliant tail trappings; but, as is also the way with men, they seemed to droop beneath the burden of royalty.

Elisabeth and I, standing at the window, waited breathlessly for the coming of the Sun, whose wont it is to stalk among these treasures of the boreal monarch, garner the diamonds into his bosom, and dash the pendent crystals to earth to be melted by the light of his countenance. He came, not slinking as is man's way, to the plunder stall, but marching boldly up and casting his darts recklessly. Then we scarcely breathed for very wonder. Not all the wealth of earth could have combined to form so rich a scene: the whole world about us gleamed and flashed with myriad, many-hued gems; the snow-covered ground glittered with incandescent lights; and, blown hither and thither from treetop and housetop, they danced and sparkled, those fairy jewels! a hand-

ful of which would have ransomed the Fairy Queen.

This was to be the busiest of days for on this Christmas Eve I had planned for an elaborate tree for my children. O! we had worked, Elisabeth and I; and often the children had come to sit through the short afternoons and early evenings to help us. The time passed merrily in the manufacture of gaily colored paper-chains, pop-corn strings, stars cut out of cardboard and covered with gilt and silver paper, and cornucopias, made of the same material. Also, there were boxes, and dainty stockings of tarlatan—one, not two, for each guest; and for these boxes and stockings much candy was to be made. Then the gifts! how I had labored with needle and eye salve in making costly presents for those who were not my best friends,—to atone, I presume, for the scanty love to accompany the gifts! How many inexpensive but to them priceless trinkets had been bought for the children! Then, there were trifles for my friends, who thought, not of the gifts, but of the love prompting them; there were articles of use and value for the servants; there were apples, oranges, refreshments, and welcome for all.

The tree, a symmetrical juniper, was procured from the high cliff by the river. Standing on its box foundation it touched the ceiling of the library and was a thing of grace and beauty. A

mysterious barrel of holly and mistletoe had arrived the day before; and this, with spruce boughs and ferns gathered by many small and willing hands, furnished ample decoration. Ropes of evergreen were festooned from ancestor to ancestor around the high walls; indeed, the ancestors seemed themselves to grow young again amid so much verdure, and smiled greenly down upon us. Wreaths of holly hung at the windows, from the looped portieres, and encircled the necks of Mercury and Bacchus who stood upon the mantel. Then there was mistletoe—quite enough to ensure each maiden a kiss at one and the same time—dangling from the chandeliers, and everywhere.

The night was clear and bitter cold. No sounds were abroad save the crackling of boards and tree-trunks, and sometimes a crunch, crunch, over the snow, as some hungry creature tramped a useless round for food. There was no barking, for the dogs had forced an entrance into the kitchen along with the incoming crowd of negroes—which crowd, I noted apprehensively, had assumed proportions far beyond my highest calculations. I had feared lest the cold and darkness might keep many of the guests at home. Aunt Judy, however, with her characteristic wisdom, did much to allay my fears:

“La, Miss Patsy!” she exclaimed to my forebodings, “aint de Firginy Quality dyed in the

wool Presbyterians? Aint dey de 'Fectually Called? Well, de Good Book say: 'De 'Fectually Called does in dis life pertake ob all de benefits dat flows'; an' I calls dis tree a flowin' benefit, sutiny!"

And Aunt Judy was right; they came.

What a time we had! How happy was I in the manifest joy of the school children and the little pickaninnies, who stood out in the hall looking for the world like wee brownies in their grotesque holiday garments, their eyes bulging with pent-up wonder, their nimble tongues cleaving to the roofs of their mouths! How they would grab the stockings from me, bulging as stockings had, for many of them, never bulged before; then, when Santa Claus, in regulation furs, whiskers, and latitudinal magnificence, offered his horns, jumping jacks, and tin horses, he had well-nigh to force them into the nerveless fingers.

Last came music—jolly, ringing Christmas music; chorus songs by the children; two-steps, to which Mrs. Williams and Cousin Peggy kept rhythmic tread behind voluminous skirt folds; a "back'ard, for'ard, petchel, steady; parse, an' swing dat lubly leddy!" for the negroes in the hall; and plantation melodies, too; and when Dilly's rich contralto and Jack's tenor struck up "Carry Me Back To Ole Firginny," and the sweet song—strangely sweet when sung by the people whose tragedy it tells—went on through

the verses, I looked, with glistening eyes toward Elisabeth who played the chords on the piano. Two tears stole down her cheeks and fell on her dress. Mr. Murray went and stood by the raised blind; while over on an old settle in the corner Cousin Peggy, Cousin Rachel, Mrs. Williams, and Mrs. Martin billed and cooed affectionately.

After the departure of the guests, I turned to my gifts, that I had not taken time to examine: from Aunt Judy, a decorated mug from the village store, whose lips rivaled those of the donor, and which bore the moth-eaten phrase "Think Of Me;" from Uncle Isham, a coon skin—a mark of high favor; from Dilly, two handkerchiefs that I shall carry in my hand henceforth as I am leaving the house for a call; from Elisabeth, a book, I having given her a copy of the same book; from Mr. Murray, a gold pen (I have five such, given me by men); from Dr. Worthington, a book entitled, "Annals of Augusta County,"—a most worthy volume. Opening it, I saw the names, "Grigsby," "Paxton," "Chandler," "McNutt," with many others; and have since felt, with this book on my library table, equal to any assaults of the Japanese against the Virginia Valley aristocracy.

There were packages containing gifts from distant friends—Elisabeth had robbed the mail daily in order that my surprise be the fuller. There was also another package that gave me a start,

for I had seen the handwriting once before; and, not caring to open it to the gaze of anyone, I slipped it in my waist.

Alone in my room, I tore off the wrapping with trembling fingers. Did my senses deceive me? there before me, encased in a richly jeweled locket was the face of a child—a chubby girl, with dark brown eyes and curls flowing over fat bare shoulders. Turning the locket, I opened the opposite side; then the far-off gates of the past opened, and I stood with him on the bank of the river whose muffled boom now struck upon my ear. How familiar now, how like a half-forgotten fragrance recalled to life, lay the boy's face before me—the great eyes, the heavy hair, the high forehead, the sensitive lips—looking out upon the world it had sworn to conquer!

I clasped the chain about my throat—the locket fell over my heart. In an agony of longing I snatched it open, kissing the face passionately. Then, turning down the light, I kneeled beside the open window, my eyes turned to the mountain peaks, that piled, tier on tier, their snow-wrapped forms into the black sky: "Gogaphy!" I cried, in a voice shaken by a hollow sob, "why are you there on that cold and lonely mountain—O, Gogaphy!"

January passed as stable in its cold beauty as December had been fickle and unlovely. Morn-

ing by morning the sun rose from behind the purple hilltops; hour by hour he strode upward, casting resplendent bolts of light to earth, yet wrought no thaw in the frozen landscape; evening by evening he sank again, a huge, blood-red warrior, bearing no trophies of the day's conquest; night after night glittering stars cast their cold, passionless eyes downward upon the numbed and voiceless earth. The ice lay many inches thick on the surface of the river; the snow lay a foot deep upon the levels; while against banks and fences, up windy ways and hollows, it piled yards high—enough unsullied purity to have cleansed the pollution of the whole earth.

Through the gleaming corridors of the forest, the half-frozen wildwood creatures tracked their hungry ways, advancing, retreating, crossing, recrossing, threading the barren aisles,—mouse, chipmunk, rabbit, mink, opossum, fox,—in uncompensating search for food; for the frozen breast of their foster mother offered scanty sustenance. The sweet-birch and fruit trees they stripped of bark; they nibbled the stems of the briar bushes, the berries of the wild privet; they burrowed tunnels under the snow to find in the lap of Nature her store of nuts, moss, roots, and seed pods; they even braved the onslaughts of Topsy and the coon dog to prowl about the kitchen dooryard after dainty bits of cast-off vegetables—such was their extremity.

Day after day, in boots, knee-skirts, and sweaters, Elisabeth and I sallied forth bearing baskets. In hollow foundations of trees along the ravines and river brink, and in the cavernous mouths of logs, we spread our tables, clearing away the snow, and scattering grain, bits of meat, and scraps from off the dining table. About brush heaps, from under which affrighted eyes watched us or bobbing flagstaffs fled away, we strewed vegetables—cabbage leaves, beet and turnip tops, carrots, and apple parings—thus hoarding up much trouble and sorrow for Uncle Isham against the springtime gardening. But we felt well repaid when, on the morrow, we found that not so much as a crumb was to scrape away, nor one half-emptied platter to clean for the table's resetting.

Once I came upon a rabbit trap on the outmost limits of my wilderness. It was an oblong-box affair with spring triggers, set and baited. Having battered its brains out against a tree, I threw the remains over into the village road; and, since that day, have found no more traps.

For the well-being of the squirrels, too, I was often troubled. So, taking ourselves one day to their favorite haunt, Elisabeth and I sat down to watch. Soon an inquisitive nose peeped from a hole in an oak-tree. We sat without moving a muscle while he scolded us roundly. Then he came down a limb or two, cocked his bushy appendage, and sputtered at us in most impudent

squirrel language. Finally, recognizing a friend, venturesome too because of hunger, he slipped to the ground, and dashed across the open to the foot of a small hickory. Here he began active operations, and dug on through the deep snow and into the frozen earth until there remained the smallest tuft of gray hair shaking above the white surface. With an unerring memory for places, he varied not an inch from the spot where, three months before, he had entombed a nut; and, bringing it to the surface, proceeded then and there to enjoy the fruit of his wise forethought, while a jay-bird jeered at him from a near-by limb.

As we sat on that snow-buried log, with that stillness of eternity about us, with the air so pure, the sky so brilliantly blue, and the earth so sparkling, it seemed a bliss just to live there in the presence of so much spotlessness, and we seemed to grasp for an instant the phantom spirit of childhood, that, in the grasping, vanished again into the irrevocable past. A group of chickadees, religiously cheerful, tumbled by, regardless of the fact that a great starved barred-owl sat blinking at us close by in the crotch of a bass-wood. The squirrel, his hunger appeased, scuttled up to his hole. The jay, now that the butt of ridicule was gone, came closer to see if we were worth scolding, but flew off in disgust. Then we heard a whirr of many wings coming from over the frozen ra-

vine-bed, and a covey of partidges settled upon a sunny slope near us; and there, where the sun had worked some thaw, they set themselves to scratching up and devouring the red berries from off a carpet of fragrant wintergreen. Thus I found that the Heavenly Father fed them.

We had many feathered callers these days; and how friendly they now bowed to us who but lately would not so much as look our way! How we neighbored together,—they, borrowing with loud promises of return when their larders were replenished,—we, giving cheerfully, and expecting nothing unless it be a sweeter spring song. At this season of the year the birds that remain with us leave the scanty covert of the woods where the hawk circles over the leafless trees, and the owl forages by the light of the stars. The cedar-birds had already intrenched themselves in the junipers about the yard, and subsisted on the soft ripe berries. The goldfinches flitted from weed to weed above the snow in the garden, thus gathering meagre seed breakfasts. Flocks of snow-buntings, chickadees, and the omnipresent sparrow, stormed the veranda itself, enticed by crumbs and grains of wheat. And I had seen three birds of magnificent plumage, cardinal grosbeaks, father, mother, and son I took them to be, for two kept together—a dull red-brown one flying close upon the wing of a gloriously brilliant fellow; while the third, smaller, conspicuously

crested, gorgeous, would sit at times alone, pensive, wondering for what he was brought into so bleak a world—he will know when he sings his love song next May! They slept in the thick-set spruce near the veranda, and their flaming beauty soon revealed their covert to Puss. Twice I switched her well, and after that, kept an open eye on the latticed window of that snow-bound green palace of royalty.

It was a delight to me that Elisabeth enjoyed my life here, and loved the little creatures as I loved them. But we had other joys in common.

There was the skating—miles on miles of clear sailing up and down the river where the ice was many inches thick. The school children and little negroes would come evening after evening to watch us in wonder, for we knew the intricacies of this invigorating sport; neither had there been such ice as this on the river for years and skating was a novelty to many of them. Some we led, through countless falls, to something approaching skill in the art. But two girls there were who refused to have us buckle our skates to them, telling us between tears that their mothers had forbidden them to waste their time in such foolishness. I would like to pinch the bilious noses of those mothers, and ask them which is better—knitted socks whose stitches have been watered by tears from unhappy young eyes, or ten-cent

socks from off the village bargain-counter, with sparkling eyes and health and happiness!

But life offered its fullest cup of joy in the sleigh rides when the days were crisp, when the sun glowed and the earth glittered, when the pure air buoyed our cares far up out of reach, when our consciences were clear as the sky above, and our hearts as light as the flaky snow tossed by the rushing feet of the horses. Bred among the hills they sped up as well as down: now on hilltops whence were to be seen miles on miles of jagged outline against the eastern sky, now down into chilly hollows where the farmers' houses were tucked away as far as possible from inspiring outlooks; many, in fact, turned their backs contemptuously on whole eye-reaches of sublimity, which, more than all else, made of them homes of beauty to be sought after.

Often, as we slipped through the village, the bright eyes of "the Cuckoo" peeped out at us from behind the inn windows that were never raised from November to April. At times the eyes of "the Mole" assisted at the peeping; then, what volumes must have been spoken on the silliness of women hieing abroad on no errand when they would better be paying calls or darning stockings at home! They can pay their calls and darn their stockings and talk of us as they please, just so they do not ride with us. Think of a rush

through such holy peacefulness beside an inflated wind-bag, that cannot get so much as a breath of pure air inside, nor absorb one single glory of the view until all the inflating gas has oozed out—and this is gas self-generating!

CHAPTER XVIII

A CHAPTER OF DISCOVERIES

The first of February, and still intensely cold. Still we were snow-bound—everything was snow-bound. Nature seemed to have given up in despair, and sunk her tides of life down, down to their lowest depths.

The moon came out these nights and lit up a world of silvery whiteness; and, in spite of the cold, we loved to walk to and fro on the veranda, and watch the rabbits hopping over the frozen yard, in and out among the trees and shrubbery. Sometimes a shadow, made perhaps by some bush, would set me trembling; or the crunching of the snow under the tread of a prowling dog would serve to remind me that the night was over chilly for outdoor promenades. But my fears I knew to be groundless; for Mr. Lovelace had long since written me that my enemy was now held secure in the state's madhouse. As for the days, they were too full for thought of trouble.

Day after day I trudged through the deep snow to meet the smiling faces of the children. The school had prospered far beyond my fondest hopes. The roll, instead of diminishing as was its wont during the rigor of midwinter, had in-

creased until the room would scarcely accommodate the pupils; and they got on famously! I myself was surprised by their rapid progress; but it was not hard to be accounted for: I had succeeded in interesting them in their work, and had implanted in them by the promise of rewards and oft-spoken praises the spirit of emulation. Not a child in the school but now worked with some object in view. Those who could not hope to excel in studies could at least strive for distinction in deportment, punctuality, or regular attendance.

Then—best means of all to assist me—I loved them, which they knew intuitively; and not one was there who did not give me at least respect and willing obedience. Many loved me with a devotion that was comically pathetic, manifesting itself in eager endeavor to please; in imitation of my manner of dress, speech, and—alas!—oddities and mannerisms; and in gifts—apples, tea cakes, bunches of ferns or blossoms stolen from precious window plants, chews of gum, and offers of chickens, pups, and kittens.

Strange to say, Elisabeth, who came to stay three weeks with me, still lingered. This dip into Nature's unsullied whiteness so entranced her that she spoke of her approaching return to civilization with regret, and little pleading was necessary to induce her to prolong her visit indefinitely.

One night, coming suddenly out on the veranda, I saw what looked to be a fox trot across the ter-

race, and gaining the Jungle, speed swiftly away as if winged toward the river. This was not Reynard's first visit, and he was no friend of mine; for Jemima had vanished one morning in January soon after daylight; and the hound, Ranger, striking a hot scent in the barnyard, had dashed boo-booing down to the river, only to return soon, empty-handed. Therefore, calling Elisabeth and Uncle Isham to counsel, we appointed the next morning on which to seek assistance of Ranger and the coon dog—Topsy's aid would likely be given unsolicited—and track the murderer to his den.

Early the next morning we set out, armed to the teeth and with murder in our hearts. Without difficulty we followed the trail in the direction of the cliff that let its precipitous sides down into the river back of the house. Veering to the right of this cliff, where the bank sloped gradually, the trail led down to the frozen water's edge, and there was lost; for, this being our skating station, the snow was too much tracked to admit of easy imprint. We could form no idea of the direction he had taken after gaining the ice, and decided to institute a careful search. Uncle Isham was asked to go across the river with the hound, while Elisabeth went down, and I up under the cliff to the ravine. But here trouble arose. The old man refused to search the opposite shore, making numerous and transparent ex-

cuses—he had not forgotten the leopard. Stranger to tell, I, too, began to see no use in so extensive a search, and moved that we confine operations to our shore of the river. Elisabeth looked us both over quickly; then, as a matter of course, volunteered to go herself and seek out the lair of the fox among those unknown fastnesses. I implored her, almost with tears, to remain with us; but as neither of us gave sensible reasons for our fears, she laughed at us, and went, it seemed to me, eagerly.

“Is you skeered dat lepperd gwine cotch her?” asked the old man, as we stood dejectedly, watching her skipping off toward the dreaded Hell Gate.

“Aren’t you ashamed to let her go!” I exclaimed. “She knows nothing of those hollows—she’ll get lost, and we’ll be to blame!”

“Ise sorry, Miss—’deed I is! but Judy done tuck meh obligation dat I aint gwine across on dat mountain, an’ Ise ’bliged ter min’ her. Why you skeered ter go, Missis?”

“I’m not a bit afraid! but I’d be ashamed to put my cowardice on Aunt Judy if I were you—you are the one who is afraid!” I replied indignantly.

“I knows,” said the old man, taking off his slouch and running the brim around through his fingers as he always did when he approached a sacred ground of conversation.

"There is nothing to know!"

"Dat ole Sang Digger got monstrous black-lookin' hyar, an' bright eyes, an' clean-lookin' skin under dat wig an' beard, Miss Patsy!"

"What do you mean?" I thundered.

"It means dat ole man 's de hansomes', spryes' young man I ebber seen; dat gray hyar an' beard jes' a hoax—aint you done know dis?"

"Who told you this?"

"Which way you gwine?" he asked, corking his bottle of information as suddenly as he had uncorked it.

For answer I turned, and went up the way I had at first proposed. On reaching the mouth of the ravine, there, coming apparently from the opposite bank, was our lost trail, or at least the trail of some fox; for by this time I knew well the unswerving line of footprints. It left the ice and ascended the ravine until within a few yards of where my Grotto lay above. Here it disappeared at the edge of a huge snowdrift that piled the ravine at this place, for here a shelving rock of limestone broke the gradual ascent by raising the ravine-bed some six or eight feet perpendicularly. Many a time had I stood upon this overhanging rock, keeping well to the projecting boulders, for here the gray trickster was wont to surprise the thoughtless brooklet into a most undignified plunge headlong, spreading her lace-trimmed skirts in quite unladylike fashion. I had also

stood below, and had tried, ever so slyly, to creep behind the tumbling brook, for the leaning rock suggested a cozy hiding place somewhere under its shadow. But she had splashed me too regardlessly. Now she was one sheet of silvery ice-foam down to where she was lost in the drifted snow.

On examining carefully about the skirts of the frozen cascade, I noticed that the snow had been considerably agitated. Digging away the snow, it was soon found that beneath it the ice had been broken away; and there, extending back under the rock, was a cavernous hole, the den of the fox. One thing that had at first prevented my guessing his retreat was this: the trail had stopped several yards below, before the snow had deepened in the recess. It was not hard to surmise the truth. In leaving his den, he had burrowed his way underneath to where the barrier was sufficiently thin to permit his springing clear of it; but in entering, knowing the exact location, he had fixed his feet against the frozen crust where the snow was shallow below, and had jumped square into the mouth of the den.

Calling to Topsy, who was rushing aimlessly about, as is the way with dull-scented dogs, I led the way; and we set to work clearing the snow and ice from the front of the cavern. Once well in, it was with difficulty that I restrained Topsy from rushing headlong into the very jaws of the enemy. The place was so big and black and shad-

owy that I feared for the small morsel of spunk and perversity; for how many foxes, wild cats, bears, or what not, might there not be standing with open arms to receive him back in that grim dungeon? One thing was peculiar about the place: the rock cavern was not itself far in-reaching, but on one side—to the left of the entrance—was a second opening somewhat elevated from the floor of the first. It seemed to lead off into the hard-clay bank, and had been recently opened though the rocks that lay about showed that, in some time long past, clay had been used as a daubing to hold them in place, proving thus the hiding place to be an old one and in long disuse. The opening seemed to lead back into infinity, and I could easily have entered, creeping on hands and knees; but the thought of crawling through a black, unknown subway to jam head-up against I knew not what nest of snarling varmints made my very blood freeze; and, thinking of such a predicament, I backed hastily toward the snow-drift and stumbled over a stone.

This stumble was unfortunate for at least one of us, for it released Topsy, who dashed headlong into the dark unknown, and wedged on, by faith and nerve rather than by prudent foresight. I listened to his "Yap—yap," growing fainter and fainter, until the "a——a" was scarcely audible—then there was silence. Calling loudly, and waiting long, I at last grew chill in my under-ice pal-

ace. Then, scrambling out, I hastened home, whither Uncle Isham had long ago preceded me. Elisabeth, to my surprise and dismay, had not yet returned.

Not a word of this adventure did I relate to anyone, for a sudden conjecture flashed through my mind. There was no time now, however, for thought of but one thing; for a larger trouble loomed before me—where was Elisabeth?

For an hour—two hours—I paced the floor in an ever-increasing terror of anxiety. Something had happened, for she cared too little for solitude to wander in voluntary exile a whole morning among those snow-buried ridges. Uncle Isham had gone to the mill; even had he been home, the chances were small that he would have consented to go alone to seek her. So, unable to endure the suspense further, I hastened down to the river and across to where we had seen her enter the mouth of Hell Gate.

There were her little shoe-prints leading straight back up the gorge. A short distance up she had struck the beaten path made by the Sang Digger, which, as there were no deviating tracks, she must have followed straight to his shelter. Strange too, after my warning, she should follow so confidently this unknown way. With a sickening fear of I knew not what, I hurried on, stumbling, slipping backward, and making poor haste in spite of my eagerness. The path kept

to the ravine-bed—straight on up to the high rock that blocked its progress; and, spite of my vow to the contrary, I stood once more alone on the spot where, three months before, my life had been saved by one against whom I even now cherished a bitterness in my heart. But the path, instead of climbing the ravine-side as before, now led straight ahead to an opening in the left-hand angle of this wall and the ravine-side—an opening just large enough to admit a man's body, stooping.

I remembered the foxes' den that we had discovered up this same ravine that long-past summer. This cave the boy had not forgotten; and now, needing a place of hiding, had robbed Reynard of his home, compelling him to seek refuge elsewhere. The hole had been closed on that day in the autumn, or else the dazzling waste of white about on this morning rendered its dark mouth now easier to be seen.

Creeping close up to the entrance, I listened for voices. For some moments I heard nothing, and was resolving to search for her elsewhere, when the voice of Mr. Lovelace broke the silence.

"He is asleep at last, is he not, Elisabeth?"

So she was there! Regardless of discovery, I knelt by the hole, trembling with a nameless terror.

"Oh, John!" broke from her lips after a silence in which his question had received no audible reply, "you have been so good to us, so heroic, so noble!

We do not deserve this sacrifice of all your powers and usefulness in life! You must stay here no longer—indeed, you mustn't!"

"'T will not be for long, I fear, Elisabeth," answered her companion. "Do you not see how much weaker he is to-day? He no longer takes nourishment, and speaks to no one."

At the sound of those words, and their revelation of the identity of the dumb girl, there came over me a wave of such bitter anguish that I sank to my knees, while my inward cry for help found speech in a low moan of pain. For a time all was still within save the weeping of Elisabeth. Then she asked:

"Did you call the physician?"

"Yes, and told him all. He says that the strain is killing him, and that unless mental relief is found ere long, there will be no need for our proposed return and surrender when the weather permits. The physician, the minister, and myself, urge him to return at once and throw himself on the mercy of the law now that the wave of feeling against him has doubtless ebbed; for that—even death itself—were better than the daily living death of remorse and cringing fear he now suffers."

"Oh, no, no, John!" cried Elisabeth in anguish. "Not that—Oh, not that! Think of the ignominy of it to one of his sensibilities, and in his station! Think of his mother—of me! There

is another way—let him stay here, and me with him. Here we will rely on the infinite mercy of God—there, the cruel justice of man will crush him; if death o’ertakes him here, perhaps it were better—poor Warren!”

“’T is the Hand of God on him now, Elisabeth,” answered John Lovelace; “——the just, inevitable retribution for sin. Is it not Eden-old that man must reap the fruit of his sowing?”

“At least he cannot go now, and I will stay with him; ’t is my duty more than yours. Will you never listen to me in this?”

“Hush, child,” he replied gently. “In no way can I ever repay the debt I owe your mother, and you——”

“You owe us nothing!” cried Elisabeth.

“Was your brother a—friend of Pat—Miss Grigsby?” he asked, his voice eager, entreating.

For a moment she was silent, and I learned afterwards that in this moment Elisabeth fought the crucial battle of her life.

“She was an acquaintance, I think,” she answered at last in a low, choked voice.

“Thank God for those words, Elisabeth!” said her companion in the tone of a man who felt a process of slow torture at last ended. “I had wondered—she is so beautiful, so fascinating——”

“No, John—’t is an injustice; is she not my best friend?”

“What woman could have wrought this evil!”

the man burst out in a fury of indignation. "Would I could see her that I might tell her that it is such women as she who turn Earth's Eden into Hell, and, knowing whom, men lose faith in the sex. He will not speak of the affair nor mention her name, neither will you nor Jim Murray tell me, but I well know that a woman's hand was in this mischief, and some day I propose to face her—!"

(I put my hand to my throat with a gesture of suffocating agony, and rose to flee; but I could not, and, sinking back, this time fell prone on my face in the pure snow that seemed to shrink away from my touch—the dart with which I had wantonly pierced the hearts of many had at last turned its sharp sting inward.)

"'T is folly to implicate any woman in this, John," said my dear, loyal Elisabeth. "'T is true that the quarrel arose out of an insane love that he bore a certain girl whose name it is unnecessary to mention, and who is far above reproach. And because she seemed to favor his suit, he became jealous of any man to whom she showed the least attention. He suffers now the punishment due for yielding to his unrestrained passions—poor brother!"

With supreme effort I staggered to my feet, and stretched out my hands as in a terror of darkness and intermingled lightning; then, as if striving to fulfill some forgotten obligation, I turned, and in

some way that I could not remember afterwards, reached home and crept into bed.

What a horrible throbbing pain tore my heart! Over and over I repeated his words as a process of slow self-torture, while through my soul they pierced as into the victim's flesh pierced the red-hot iron of the inquisitor: "It is such women as she who turn Earth's Eden into Hell, and knowing whom, men lose faith in the sex." Then there would come before me the face of the man I loved, only to rise far above me and vanish, leaving in its stead the face of another, whose eyes I had thought to see no more on earth, and whose trembling, sin-scarred soul approached even now perhaps in fearfulness its last great mortal change there in that cave on the mountain.

While I lay in this frame of mind, Elisabeth entered my room in her usual sprightly manner and humming a tune. On seeing me in bed, she hushed her noise and came to my side. I feigned sleep, for somehow I was unable just yet to face her. Then she went over to the fire and sank wearily into a rocker, leaning her head on her hand. Watching her, I saw that her face was white, her eyes hollow, and under them black circles were traced by the hand of suffering. "I can stand it no longer! I must tell her!" she moaned to herself.

"In God's name, Elisabeth," I cried, unable to

control myself longer; "what is there to tell, and why did you go—there!"

She rose to her feet in surprise, while I, springing from bed, ran to her, and, dragging her down into the chair, threw myself beside her—weeping.

"Oh, Patsy!"—her arms were about me, her tears mingling with mine. "Did you not know? Warren is alive—I have just come from him." Then, forgetting her own sorrow at sight of my uncontrollable grief, she drew me up close to her, and fondled me as a mother would, kissing my bowed head.

"He is—?" I got no further.

"—'the Sang Digger's daughter'," she finished. "He is ill; he cannot—last—long, he—" a dry sob choked her, and I could not speak. "I have visited him there for weeks—ever since one morning in December, when John Lovelace, meeting me by the river, revealed himself to me, and took me to him."

"Why did you not tell me?" I asked; for it was a bitterness to me that she had thus deceived me, keeping from me that which concerned me so vitally.

"You know, Patsy," she answered simply.

"And you know the—'Sang Digger'?" I faltered.

"He is my second brother," said Elisabeth quietly; and I raised my eyes to read the cause of the sudden softness that had crept into her voice

as she spoke these last words. But she looked away from me out through the window, and went on as if there were nothing for me to read in her beautiful, tender eyes.

“Have you never heard us speak of ‘John,’ the boy who saved Warren’s life from drowning here in this river many years ago? Mother had come to the mountains for our health; and after that incident, she took the boy home with her, entered him in school, helped him through college and the law school and gave him a start in life. And he”—she went on dreamily—“he has been nothing but a blessing from God to us—so good, so thoughtful, so clever—so different from poor Warren! We were proud of him—Mother and I; but Warren was jealous, because of this, and because of his popularity and bright prospects. So we left the city, in which he was a leading young lawyer, and pitched our tents in your eastern city.

“After that awful night, hearing of our trouble, John left his home, ostensibly for extended travel; and, searching Warren out in his hiding place, arranged a disguise for both, and took him away—where, not even we have known until I chanced upon him there by the river. Mother is still in ignorance of his hiding place, for we fear that, in her eagerness to come to him, she might betray him into the hand of the law. It has been

for our sakes that he has done this, resigning the candidacy of an enviable office to which his friends urged him, and notwithstanding he thought best that Warren throw himself on the mercy of the court; but we could not bear the thought of the probable result, as public feeling ran high against him."

As I listened to this story of his life whom Elisabeth had never before dared to speak of to me lest I guess her secret, my heart sang over and over, spite of its bitterness: "I did not guess your secret, but—did I not feel your worthiness?—Oh, Gogaphy!"

"And you never recognized Warren?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no!" I cried. "Think you I could have lived here in careless ease,—with him there; suffering, dying—and never have gone to him, nor told you, his sister?—Oh, Elisabeth!" I got up and threw my arms around her. "Tell me, does he speak of me—does he despise me?"

"No, Patsy, he loves you as madly as ever. For this reason I have feared to tell you lest you go to him, and thus open an old wound for which you have no cure. Not even to John have I spoken of what you were to Warren."

"Why, Elisabeth?" I asked.

"I could not," she replied simply.

"Why, Elisabeth?" I asked again.

"Because—" she faltered, "—because I could

not pain him. Warren told me,—besides, it was easy to guess; he loves to speak of you and those days he passed with you here that summer.”

I turned my face to hers in an agony of appeal.

“Don’t, Elisabeth—don’t—I cannot bear it! Am I not to blame for your brother’s ruin! Have I not died a thousand deaths?—could remorse and sorrow kill—and—now—!”

She held my trembling little body close, caressing me.

“Could I love you thus, dear, had you caused his ruin—you poor, poor child? ’T was his own insane jealousy, and his consciousness of being unworthy of your hand, that aroused in him a suspicion of fickleness in you; though I, his sister, say it—he was not worthy of your hand, Patsy.”

“I would have married him, Elisabeth—I had promised; but I knew not what love was—Oh, Elisabeth!”

“’T is better to know it not than to love in vain,” she answered me, looking away to the window.

“Elisabeth!” I cried, divining with the eye of love, and seeking to look into her face, “you have loved—you *do* love somebody—him?”

“You ought to be very happy, dear,” she answered me with a gentleness that awed me; “for, oh Patsy, he is most worthy!”

Again I seemed to hear his bitter words: “It is such women as she who turn earth’s Eden into Hell, and, knowing whom, men lose faith in the

sex." Then, it seemed that he, himself, stood before me tall and straight and silent as my love pleaded before him for its life that was so dear to me, and as I pleaded, turned from me to the outstretched arms of Elisabeth.

"I? I ought to be—happy!" I almost shrieked; "I—happy!"

Then she took me up as one takes up a little sick child, laid me gently on the bed, and left the room. A few minutes later she peeped in, to see if I lay quietly. She was dressed for a walk, and though she said nothing, I knew that she was off on an errand of mercy.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH IS A SACRIFICE

Late that afternoon, knowing that I must, I dressed and came downstairs to look after certain Saturday duties. I had forgotten Topsy, and the strange cave discovered in the morning, until Dilly hunted me up, and exploded her troubles into my already overcharged ear.

"Miss Patsy, I jes' likes ter know what come o' dat pesky dawg, Topsy; I aint nebber knowed dat dawg ter miss de grace, let alone a meal o' vittals, 'fore dis."

"He followed me hunting this morning, and no doubt is still persevering in well-doing."

"Miss Patsy, dat dawg 's dead!"

"Why on earth do you think so?" I said, a little hastily in an endeavor to conceal a start of surprise.

"Kayse I keeps on hearin' 'im rantin' an' screechin' down in de bowls o' de earth sommers. Now, I don' perten' ter know whar de dawg Kingdom Come is, but I *does* know dat if dey follows dey vocashuns like dey say we all 's gwine do, den Topsy 'll be 'bliged ter spen' he time barkin'. La, Miss Patsy, I sutiny does hope dey aint gwine reside close ter we all!"

Motioning me to follow, she led the way out into the back yard. Sure enough, I heard a despairing yelp, far-off, muffled, that seemed to issue, as Dilly said, from the very bowels of the earth. It was Topsy, calling loudly for help. His voice seemed to come from no spot in particular; though, on putting my ear to the ground, I could hear it—now toward the back-yard fence in the direction of the ravine, then seemingly lost beneath the foundations of the old house. I noticed, also, that his barks never went beyond a certain spot toward the fence—something here seemed to block his egress.

“He is in the cellar, Dilly—run and look,” I said. Then, when she had gone, hastening to the back fence I called Topsy, who answered joyfully, coming my way along his underground corridor. If there were a secret dungeon or witch-hole about, Dilly was not to know it, neither were Uncle Isham and Aunt Judy; for, besides seeking to preserve the traditions and honor of my family, I had no mind to be left at this season with cooking, house-cleaning, milking, feeding, and wood-chopping, all on my inexperienced hands.

Dilly did not find Topsy; and, as I had intended and arranged, she did not even hear his voice.

“You were right,” said I mournfully, my kerchief to my eyes, when she again appeared above,

"that is Topsy's ghost—do you notice the sepulchral quality of his voice?"

"'Deed I does, Miss," she wailed, following my example in irrigation. "'Deed I does—poo' dawg!"

Fortunately, Uncle Isham had not yet returned from mill, nor Aunt Judy from a shopping tour about the village; so I hastened, ere it be too late, to insure secrecy.

"Dilly," I said, "come upstairs—I have something for you."

Once there, I produced the first thing that came my way. It happened to be a silk shawl of value, and one I had not dreamed of giving away.

"You can have this," said I regardless, "blue does not become me."

Dilly stared in open-mouthed wonder, as well she might.

"Dis—fur—me! La, Missis, I kyarnt jes' grasp de signification—blue 's yo' mos' becomified color!" Then after some moments of eloquent admiration on her part I said, as an afterthought, as she prepared to bear the treasure off to be sported at future woodpile levees:

"Suppose we tell the old folks nothing about Topsy's ghost; they might be nervous about it."

"You shorely don' think Ise gwine tell dem ignorfied coons dat! Uncle Isham 's jes' fool 'nouv ter take dat shovel o' his'n an' dig up a

whole Paradise o' yelping ghosts. I'se got more gumpshun den dat!"

That evening when Aunt Judy called Topsy for his dinner, I heard Dilly say:

"Taint no use wasten bref on dat dawg; Miss Patsy done gib 'im ter Jack—he got dat pesky."

"Needn't come ter me coughin' up a lie like dat, gal! aint you done know dat de inventshun o' cruelty ter critters is de Missis' hobby-horse? She leastways aint gwine let no low-down nigger like dat Jack hab no pet o' hern ter meck a bone-sack outen—taint her morals."

She came at once to me to learn the truth.

"Dilly is right, Auntie—he 's gone; but perhaps he 'll come back."

"Fo' de Lawd!" gasped Aunt Judy, stumbling out backwards.

I went about stealthily that evening and listened. Poor little fellow! he was now under the library; but so far down, and the floor was so thick, that his voice, hoarse and weak by overmuch exertion, scarcely reached me. I put my mouth to the floor and called him; and his answering whine, so joyful, so hopeful of the help that never came, brought tears to my eyes. Little innocent sacrifice he was, offering up his life for my salvation; for it now stood revealed—the secret passage, the underground dungeon, the tomb of my grandfather, the hiding place of the Goblin!

The house stood on a knoll which sloped slight-

ly in front to the Jungle, and to the river at the back. The cellar extended under the back half of the house, around which half the stone foundation rose to a height of several feet from the ground because of the slope to the river. The library, and across from it, the parlor, rested almost on the ground, and under them was no excavation.

I went into the cellar back of the library, and listening, could hear him here and there under the library but much deeper down than the floor of the cellar. Then calling, I could hear how he made frantic efforts to climb upward toward my voice, only to fall backward with pitiful yelpings. Thus it seemed that the passage extended under the floor of the cellar, and, reaching the dungeon near its top, had let the little fellow down suddenly to the bottom, the only means of safe approach to which was, no doubt, by ladder. Then I searched carefully about the library—there was no clue, no trap-door. I peered behind the old portraits, and besought my grandfather above the mantel to show me the secret pass into that charnel-house where even now his bones must be crumbling. But his face, encased in a metal frame—sombre and ponderous,—looked benignly down upon me from its high vantage, and told me nothing. There must be but one entrance—the one in the ravine; and that would not have been found had not the old man opened the long-closed

door in the cave-side, and, being forced to leave unexpectedly, had been unable to reseal it.

That evening Elisabeth insisted to Dilly that I would not require her services, and decked her out for a dance to be held in "Darktown" down by the river. Dilly was surprised at this delightful turn in affairs, and I was distressed; for we had only that morning convinced her that a dance in Darktown was beneath the notice of the cream of Mooretown's blacks. My reasons were of a more private and selfish order, and were two: first, Dilly and Aunt Judy's "east rolls" were quite too popular already; then, and more weighty, there was always a chance of Dilly's meeting the man, to wash, iron, and cook for whom she would willingly resign her régime of bossdom with me. But I said nothing, for Elisabeth, who took never such authority with Dilly, must have had some reason for her unusual action.

I, longing to be alone, threw out many hints which were accepted by Cousin Peggy. Elisabeth, however, refused to leave me, neither would she let me escape to my room; so we sat together by the library fire.

My companion was troubled, thinking, I knew, of her brother—that gay, reckless, debonair fellow, who, fifteen months before, had been the object of her sisterly devotion and solicitude, and my accepted lover. I had known him only a year, but from the first he had given me an idolatrous

worship, and had exhibited fits of insane jealousy did I so much as smile upon others. I feared then, and was now sure of it, that I did not feel for him that love and respect that a woman should have for the man she is to marry—and herein lay my chief transgression. Having given him my promise, I would not have failed in it; but with shame I confess that, not loving him as I should, it seemed to give me a certain satisfaction when I found he could be goaded into a frenzy of jealous rage by my according even the smallest favor to another. I did not fully realize then—that of which I have since repented in sackcloth and ashes—that in a thousand ways known to coquettes I tormented him because he was not strong enough to treat my idle teasing with the calm indifference it merited, nor noble enough himself to discover the constancy of my real nature that burned steadily beneath a seemingly light exterior.

Then came that awful night of the great cotillion, when I had thoughtlessly permitted the attentions of one against whom my fiancé entertained a special dislike. Warren was impulsive, passionate, and knew not the name of self-control. They quarreled in a hotel lobby,—over what, there was much conjecture but no certain knowledge, and the morning papers said: “George Courtland came to his death by a pistol wound inflicted at the hand of his friend, War-

ren Montague, only son and heir to the Montague millions."

Thus it was that the gay life of the metropolis bore me aloft on the crest of its tidal wave of soullessness, and then dashed me out, a wreck, upon the shore of my far-off green isle of refuge. And through it all, the love of his sister, Elisabeth, had glowed along my dark pathway as a radiant star of faith and hope and undying love; and her faith in me it was that, above all else, helped me lift my head above the flood of remorse and shame that threatened hard to engulf me.

The clock on the mantel struck the hour of nine when I heard a soft step on the veranda.

"Listen, Elisabeth," I whispered, laying my hand on her arm, which trembled violently.

"I will look," she answered quickly; then, rising, she went to the door, opened it cautiously, and spoke to somebody:

"How is he to-night?"

"He is resting—Jim Murray is with him," said the voice that was now always with me. But I grew suddenly cold, as with a nameless fear, and looked wildly about for a way of escape.

"She is in there—good-night!" whispered Elisabeth; then I heard her ascending the stair softly.

He did not answer her, but his quick step sounded in the hall and at the library door. I rose to my feet and stood before the fire, trembling violently, my hands clasped behind me, my brain

whirling in a conflicting tumult of joy and anguish—the struggle of my life was on.

He came into the room and toward me, while from his eyes an exquisite tenderness—the first proud passion of a soul untainted by earth's filth-pots—radiated, unrestrained, to meet the answering light in mine. Then, seeing me grasp the mantel for support, he hesitated, and spoke, his voice vibrant with feeling:

“Elisabeth told me that you knew, and that you—needed—me. I have come—Oh, Patsy!—do you?”

For a moment I stood still, while fear, remorse, and the resolutions born of discretion trailed their unwelcome shapes off into the shadows, and the floods of Lethe flowed over that waste track of the past, shutting out, too, all future vision. Then with a glad cry, a piercing agony of joy, I called his name, and throwing out my arms, ran to him through the flickering firelight.

Of this hour in my life words fail me to speak. I seemed to have come on my earthly pathway to some high eminence whence there stretched out before me the Land of the Fruition of Earthly Longing: fairest sense-beguiling flowers shook out their soothing fragrances; soft breezes whispered of a bliss on Earth preferred to Heaven's; and there vibrated, on that high ether, strains of sweet, selectest melody. Thus catching the vision of an immortal happiness on which no mortal may

look and live, I saw not the chasm between, on the brink of which I tottered.

We stood together in the fire-glow, his arms about me, his lips caressing my hair, which came no higher than his shoulder.

"My darling," he murmured, "my joy stifles me! Can it be that I, whom life has tossed so turbulently, am now to enter my haven—can it be?"

"My love—my king!" I cried, "if something should part us—!"

"Hush!" he said, putting his hand over my lips. "Nothing can part us: not death, nor eternity sever love—'t is as the eternity of God—deathless."

"I am not worthy of you!" I tried to tell him in my poor, weak way. "You do not know the blackness of my heart, its past soullessness; knowing all, you will abhor me!"

He raised my face to his, and looked long into my eyes: then he kissed them both tenderly.

"True, beautiful eyes—mine," he said softly. "They tell me that my childhood's ideal has not failed me through these years of illusiveness. Once, 't is true, I had a lurking fear born of a lover's jealousy; but that, Elisabeth dispelled."

I drew from him, shuddering from head to foot as if the death-pang were on me, and stooping, warmed myself at the fire. How wildly I struggled there with my heart to tell him all and throw



“ ‘Oh, Patsy! Do you?’ ”

myself on his mercy! But it cried out in an agony of yearning love: "Not yet—not yet!"

"Tell me of your early life," I entreated, calling him to sit beside me on a sofa. And there, side by side, my hand in his, my tears sometimes speaking in sympathy when my tongue could not, we trod together that thorny path his young feet had pressed whose rights were equal with mine to a life of luxury.

"My first recollection," he said, "is of a home in some city, and of my beautiful and gentle mother. I remember, too, of another person who lived with us, and who caused my mother much sorrow. This person, I know now, must have been my grandfather, though it is my mother alone that I remember with any definiteness. Sometimes she would weep for hours at a time, and, putting her arms about me, would speak lovingly of my father, who died during my infancy, and would call me her little only helper. How well, even now, I feel the swelling of my young breast as I offered to place myself between her and the world! But she would tell me that to help her best I must be thoughtful, gentle, and unselfish, and become a noble and useful man in the world. Now I know that she feared that some of my grandfather's blood, flowing in my veins, would work ruin in me.

"One day she hastily packed her trunk, and with what money she had stored, we left the city,

and traveled, it seemed to me, for an eternity. At last, getting off at a village, she procured a room, and set about earning our living with her needle. Those were happy days to me; and my mother cried less and seemed cheerful. But my young eyes could see how thin and white she became, until, when on windy days we walked together, I would hold tightly to her for fear the wind would blow her away.

“One night, after she had been in bed for days, she fastened her locket about my neck; and, sobbing, held me close, telling me to think of her, to wear her locket always, and to look at it when I was troubled or lonely, or was tempted to do what she and God had forbidden. In the morning she was dead, and my little feet trod then their first Gethsemane.

“After that, I was sent to some asylum where there were many little children together. We had enough to eat and to wear and were kindly treated, but there was no one to love us, and many of us would cry at night for our mothers in Heaven.

“Then one day a man and woman came, and I was called in to see them. The woman was not so pretty as my mother, nor so dainty; but she patted me kindly on the head, and asked if I wished to go with her to live among the beautiful mountains. They brought me here where you found me that summer years ago. I was not more than six or

seven perhaps; but was taken into the family as general utility boy, being taught by degrees to wash, scrub, milk, garden,—gaining thus by incessant toil a shelter and enough clothes to cover my body. The people were kind in their way, but were hopelessly plebeian, having no ideals in life, and no ambitions further than to eat, to sleep, to be clothed, and to gossip with their neighbors. You may perhaps imagine how I suffered who had been, until a few months before, wrapped about by the love and tender care of a gentle mother,—But do not think that I now regret those days of hardship—they were the making of me. They taught me endurance, humility, self-control, perseverance, and best of all—they brought me *you*, who, with your fairy face and manner, your proud little ways, your ideas of what a boy should become in life, and your kind heart that spurned me not because of rags and ignorance, first planted in my soul the resolve to conquer my environment, and rise to your level. How my whole dwarfed nature opened and grew under the warm, congenial rays of yours! and though I was a ragamuffin and you an aristocrat, how much more to my liking were you than any I had known since my mother left me!”

“Look at that portrait, Gogaphy,” I said, pointing to my grandfather’s face over the mantel, that, looking down upon us, reflected the serenity of a

purposeful life. "I have often thought of late that, though you lack the inheritance, the best of our ancestors is centered in you and lacking in me."

"He is—?"

"My grandfather, and that—" pointing to the lovely bride face beside him, "—that is my grandmother, Patsy, for whom I am named."

He looked at them long and silently; then he buried his face in his hands:

"And I—the offspring of his murderer—dare thus to sit with you beneath their smiling faces!"

Throwing my arms around him, I drew his head down to my breast, whispering:

"My lover is the sum of their perfections—a nobleman, and my—king!"

"I must tell you what I know of that crime," he began, after a silence between us. "After having been convinced of our relationship by the resemblance between your father and my mother, as shown by our lockets, and learning from you of the fate of your grandfather, I questioned Dr. Worthington, an old resident. He told me much of my ancestors and their doings, though knowing nothing of the part played by my grandfather in the death of yours. After this I questioned the old man freely, and this I find to be the correct version of the affair:

"Our great-grandfather's first wife, the daughter of an Englishman who had to do with the im-

portation of indentured servants, was a beauty, but possessed of an evil temper and unlovely disposition. Her son, my grandfather, inherited all of his mother's evil nature; he was willful, revengeful, and unforgiving, from childhood. As he grew to manhood and to old age, with him grew his infirmity; until now, bowed down by years his distorted body cages a soul as black and irredeemable as a devil's in hell. But how so corrupt a body could have begotten so fair a flower as my mother is enough to baffle the comprehension of all save an adept in hereditary influences. She seemed to shine as a bright, solitary star through the night of her setting, receiving her physical, mental, and moral endowments from a source back of her father—her grandfather.

"The son of our great-grandfather's second marriage, James, inherited from his mother a rare charm of soul—in fact the combined excellences of both parents centered in him as they were lacking in his half-brother. He inherited also a considerable fortune from his mother, and from his father the homestead—now yours—which was forfeited by his elder brother because of the latter's wild life and irregular habits.

"There was no daughter; but a niece, Patsy, of whom you have spoken to-night, had made her home with her uncle from early childhood. She grew from a bud of rare promise into the fairest flower of the countryside: 'The lovely Patsy'

she was called; and her outward perfection did but image the purity of her untainted soul. Many a gallant for miles around knelt in the meeting-house and worshiped, the while dreaming his heaven to be in the approving light of her eyes. Wooers came from the gay capital and even from overseas; but she heeded them not, and gave her heart into the keeping of her cousin, the gallant James Grigsby. They were married here, and she became your father's mother.

"Their happiness was unsullied, save for the bitterness of the elder brother who had also loved his cousin with all the intensity of his brute nature. Rage and thirst for revenge stamped their seal upon his heart; he was seldom seen about his wonted haunts. Then one day, after long waiting, the opportunity offered; the demons of hell came to his aid; and, in a demoniacal fury he slew his brother—where or by what means I know not."

"And I,—" I interrupted him, "can show you the entrance to his sepulchre—to-day it claimed a living victim—listen!" I stooped, and putting my face to the floor, called "Topsy—Topsy?" A weak whine answered me.

Then as he walked the room, peering, as I had done, into every crevice for a possible trap-door or secret spring—for my grandfather had disappeared from within this room,—I told him of the

morning's adventure and begged his aid in saving my little pet from a horrible fate.

It was not until he left me, late that night, that, there came to me the full realization of what my life would be henceforth without his love and the security of his presence. It was as if a traveler, lost, and famished for water, at last stretched forth his hand to dip from some bubbling spring, which, or ever he tasted, sank beneath the scorching sands about him. What lesson was it the will of the Invisible Pity that I learn in this essence of agony? Was it the lesson of humility, of self-forgetfulness, of my dependence on a Help that was not of man?

With a bitter cry for that help which I must have and live, I threw myself prone upon the floor, my heart dead within me.

CHAPTER XX

WHICH IS A CHAPTER OF TROUBLES

On the twenty-second of February, a holiday, Mr. Lovelace and I met by appointment at the ravine's mouth and proceeded on a tour of investigation.

While I waited within the cave, my companion entered the secret corridor armed with a pistol and lantern, and made his way back until his answering halloos were lost in the distance. After a time, however, he returned, dusty, cobwebby, and disappointed. Having passed the narrow entrance, he had found that the corridor grew wider by degrees until its height was such as to permit of an almost upright position. A hundred yards in he had come upon a huge iron door, firmly encased in rock and securely locked. It must have been to this door that Topsy had come, ere he fell into the dungeon to find himself sealed in a living tomb. But how had he gotten in? No doubt he had found it slightly ajar, and, nosing it open in his haste to be at the enemy, he had caused it to rebound into its iron socket. Could we open it?

I collected keys of every size and description: none would fit the keyhole. Then with what tools could be found for the purpose, we tried to pry

off the lock, but in vain, for age and dampness had incrusted the whole door in an unyielding armor of rust. Neither was it possible to loosen the door from its holdings, for the passage at this point had been drilled through solid rock into which the iron gate had been immovably imbedded.

So there was nothing to be done for poor Topsy. Had it not been for the resulting publicity, I would have called a locksmith, or torn up the library floor, or dug an entrance beneath the foundation of the library—any way to disentomb him. But there were many about—even under my roof—who could keep no secret; and the horror of a family skeleton held up thus to the greedy gaze of the public checked my yearnings to save my little pet.

I could hardly bear to think of him waiting patiently in his tomb for his mistress who was now for the first time to fail him, in his bitterest extremity. I rarely entered the library, until one morning, putting my ear to the floor by the closed door, as I had done day after day, there came no whine answering to my call. Then, opening the door, I rushed in; and putting my face to the floor, called brokenly, while bitter tears fell upon that unmerciful partition. There was no answer—

On the next afternoon—for troubles, like crows, roost on me in flocks—"the Mole" and "the Cuckoo" came to call, happening in at that

uncouth hour for callers, 2 P. M., when a woman with any sense of the decencies about her likes best to nap, to work, or to be alone—certainly not to giggle and gossip with two impossible people.

It was Saturday, and an ugly day: not caring to be out, I had set about doing what I often do on rainy afternoons. Suddenly I was awakened from peaceful slumber by the sound of loud voices—there seemed to be at least six—in the hall below. I sprang from the bed, my kimono flying, my hair doing the same, and reached the door, thanking Providence that I had been in time, for a well-known nasal was wafted upward:

“Yes indeed—I ’ll go right up.” Then another voice:

“Guess she ’s takin’ her nap; she needen’t mind us.” I knew her well also. There had doubtless been much burrowing and pecking about the village lately, the results of which were to be worked off on me.

“Mebbe youse right, ladies, you knows bes’,” began the welcome voice of Dilly, to whose strategy I looked hopefully as my only way of escape. “I aint ’sposed ter hab de privilege youse got; but I dassent bus’ in on Miss Patsy at dis hour—dis am de Missis’ holy hour.”

“Holy hour!” gasped the Cuckoo.

I heard the Mole’s footsteps ascending the

stairs—she would see for herself how holy the hour was! The Cuckoo remained below to question.

A wild impulse seized me. I turned the key with a loud click, scrambled with much noise through the window upon a tiny balcony, and from there by way of a back stairway down to the veranda below, from which it was no trouble to enter the sitting-room by way of a window. The kimono was not unbecoming, neither were the flowing locks; so I sat by the grate toasting my toes and listening as the Mole burrowed vainly against the firm lock above, and as the Cuckoo heard from Dilly of my leviathan pieties.

During this hour I was reported to read the Scriptures, which was often true; to pray, which I fear was not often true; to send off fabulous gifts to the needy in China and everywhere; to read missionary calendars and periodicals; and to study such worthy productions as Baxter's "Saints' Rest", though Dilly called it "Baxter's Saints' Bunyon", thus confounding it slightly with another and equally praiseworthy volume.

That the Cuckoo had no Dilly at home was evident from her loud-voiced credulity: "Ah!" "Is that so?" "Why people say—"—thus she punctuated Dilly's lies.

"Ladies," I called, when the Mole had again appeared below, "pray come in and warm yourselves." I pushed back the door and stood be-

fore the abashed ones, my frozen smile of welcome ill concealing the rage that boiled within.

Dilly raised her eyebrows slightly, but was ready.

"Miss Patsy, I tole de ladies you was allus occupied in secret at dis season, an' would dey step in ter de fire an' warm deyselves whiles I notifies you."

"I am never so busy as to keep my friends waiting, Dilly," said I reprovngly, as they offered their lips for the regulation kiss.

"Are you in a hurry?" I asked as they stood awkwardly, looking me over.

"Youse blockin' de do', Miss," said Dilly, who thinks she must boss me nowhere so much as in the presence of other women. I motioned her with great show of authority to retire, at the same time removing myself from the entrance, for in truth they could not have passed me.

"I went up to your room—it was locked." Mrs. Williams' tones bristled with interrogation.

"Oh! the one on the right hand, front? That is the haunted chamber. I often hear scramblings about that room when I listen through the key-hole."

"Good Gracious!" she gasped. "Didn't I hear that same noise—something knocking and shuffling—then, footsteps?"

"Footsteps!" I repeated anxiously. "I 've never heard them—what can they be?"

Mrs. Williams looked at Mrs. Martin; then both looked at me.

"People say—" began the latter.

"Let 's go and listen!" interrupted the former.

"Please don't!" I entreated, "it makes me nervous."

"No," agreed the bird. "Let 's sit here and chat." And chat they did, till by beaking and scratching and nosing, they had well-nigh robbed every nest in the countryside of its most sacred secrets.

"Have you heard of the two spies in the village?" asked Mrs. Williams, in a tone which indicated this to be the goal of their previous efforts. I wondered if they noticed the quick tension of my muscles as I strove to bring my startled self in check. But I answered carelessly:

"What have spies to do with us, pray, here in our peaceful corner?"

"Jim says they asked him about the Sang Digger, and offered him a dollar to show 'em where the old man lived. Jim wouldn't cross the river but he showed 'em where he comes down out of Hell Gate."

"Folks say the Sang Digger is a refugee. I certainly hope them spies will find him," chimed in Mrs. Martin, soothingly.

"The minister and Dr. Worthington visit them—and—your—friend—"

"Certainly they visit the Sang Digger!" I re-

plied warmly. "Why should they not? The dumb girl is ill—she needs help."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams. "Wonder if she can drink buttermilk!"

"I might send her a glass of quince jelly by the minister," added Mrs. Martin.

"Those men might not be spies—Jim just said they seemed powerful inquisitive about that old man and the girl."

One rose to examine some photographs on the mantel.

"It is early—why hurry?" I asked as anxiously as was possible, and springing to my feet at the first word.

"Miss Grigsby, could I get a start of yeast from you? I haven't been out before for months." This was from Mrs. Williams, who, Dilly said, came as regularly and faithfully to the Nunnery for yeast, as she went on the Sabbaths, with her six, to church for the meat and drink of the gospel and gossip.

Just then the knocker sounded loudly; whereupon both ladies reseated themselves to await results. It was Mr. Murray, who was now much at home at the Nunnery; and his free step soon announced him outside the sitting-room door. There was no way of escape, for the room had but one door, and to depart through the window, besides being ungraceful, would reveal my recent

manner of approach. So I sat still, while the silence was little short of fierce.

The ladies, in their haste to be reseated, had deposited themselves on a sofa back of the door and waited in anxious anticipation.

"Miss Grigsby?" called Mr. Murray softly from the hallway.

The Mole winked her bright eye at the Cuckoo; the Cuckoo nodded her beak at the Mole. I said nothing in answer, but looked the quintessence of idiocy. My face burned; with one hand I grasped the tumbling tresses, and with the other clutched the décolleté neck of the kimono, then its lower front where some half-yard of elaborate lace underskirt sported coquettishly in and out of its folds. The minister opened the door. He did not see the ladies. He did not seem one bit abashed by the sight of flowing locks and forbidden lace. Straight he came to me. He took one hand—he would have taken two had not I gained sufficient strength to gesticulate wildly with the other.

"What an adorable little Jap—!" he exclaimed.

"There—there!" I screamed, pointing wildly.

"Can't you speak to folks!"

Then when he—an abashed and confounded shepherd—turned to encounter two of his most termagant fleeces, I left them to do with him as they deemed prudent, and fled to the ghost chamber above.

When I returned below stairs a half-hour later, Mr. Murray had gone into the library and sat by the grate awaiting me. The gloom of an early winter twilight was gathering without, hastened by the clouds that thickly blanketed the sky. The rain kept up an incessant patter. The long-dreaded thaw—dreaded this year because of the unusual depth of snow, and thick ice on the river—was at last upon us; for at this season of the year, the river, from its dignified flow within its confines, had been once or twice known to burst its banks, and, raging far afield as an uncaged wild beast, to leave devastation in its wake.

I glanced anxiously at the clock. It was near five, and Elisabeth, who went to the mountain early that morning, had not yet returned. I felt that something was wrong, for Mrs. Williams' information concerning the spies troubled me; and, standing by the window peering out into the shadows for a glimpse of Elisabeth, I made poor shift to entertain my caller. Perhaps it was the reflex action on him of my evident distress; but he, too, seemed ill at ease. For a time he walked the floor; then he came and stood beside me. Once—twice I looked at him, and discovered his eyes fixed upon me, and in them a look I had seen before, when I had thus surprised him. Then I looked away, fearing what I had long feared; for, with woman's intuition, I knew that he loved me.

Suddenly he turned to me, and taking both my

hands in his, looked into my face. He was much agitated, and I could hear the beat of his heart.

"Miss Grigsby," he said, his voice quivering, "do you know what I have to tell you—what I have had to tell you since that morning in the library? I can endure it no longer. Day after day I see you, and you have so filled my life that I can no longer live without you. Night after night I lie through the watches, thinking of you, weaving the threads of our lives together into one long silken strand that cannot be broken. I must know the truth—tell me, do you love me?"

"Mr. Murray," I said, my lips trembling, "have I given you reason thus to claim me?"

"Only by your gentle courtesy, your confidences, your kindly consideration. But I have known," he added hoarsely, "that it must be. I have borne your image in my heart for years—before I ever knew you; and God, who has heretofore shed the light of his favor upon me, will not now fail me."

"And is the desire of your heart always His will?" I asked.

"I cannot live without you," he murmured, and would have drawn me to him; but I could not permit this further deception.

"No, no!" I cried shrinking from him. "My dear, dear friend, that I so much respect, that I so much admire,—I cannot deceive you! Would God I could love you, but I cannot—oh, I cannot!"

He stood straight and silent before me, and his face showed deathly pale. And now I was to see how a soul that is worthy passes through deep waters, leaning on a Strength that I knew little of. There in the twilight shadows he drained his cup of bitterness to the dregs; and, as another once of yore, turned to comfort me.

"Poor little girl—how I have grieved you, who am not worthy to mar one moment of your sweet life! Forgive me!"

"Can you forgive *me?*"" I sobbed. "I would rather die than wound you."

"I have nothing to forgive, little woman, but much to remember of your sweetness and purity—oh, Patsy, you were my idol!" Then he did what such men as he alone can do—he took me in his arms, and pressing a kiss upon my forehead, was gone.

I sank upon the settle, weeping; but started up again, my tears frozen at their outlet. I heard something under me, a queer grating noise, then a tap—tap, as when one strikes cautiously on iron. It was unmistakable: it came from the old settle.

This settle, an unaccountable adjunct of the library's furnishings, resembled as near as anything else a huge, oblong chest, upholstered in dark green cloth of heavy texture. It stood in the chimney corner to the left of the fireplace, and appeared to have been built into the wall, filling up

the entire interstice. I had at first taken it to be a huge receptacle, perhaps of family treasure, and had searched for a hidden spring by which to reveal its interior. But neither had the workman employed about the house, nor had I, found any clue to its secret. Then I thought to remove so unwieldy an object from my favorite room; but, having been convinced by the carpenters that its removal might jeopardize the wall at that place, so firmly was it encased, I converted the settle into a cozy corner, piling it high with pillows.

The sound was repeated, this time more distinctly, as the slipping of a rusty bolt in its socket. Had I not now been suspicious of every spot, every sound in this room, I would perhaps have paid no attention to what could well have been a rat gnawing in the wall. As it was, I sprang from my seat with a shriek, and rushed from the accursed room out upon the veranda.

Mr. Murray was by me instantly.

"Come!" I panted. "Something frightened me—come!"

He went fearlessly in, and, striking a match, lighted the gas. As the glow diffused into the darkest corners, I ventured timidly in. No one was in the room, and nothing seemed unusual to my companion. But I, who knew its furnishings, saw at once that all was not right. The settle had been piled with pillows when I left the room—

now there were but two left. Something else was not as it should be: my grandfather's heavily framed portrait above the mantel was hanging awry. It had been shifted at least six inches from its equilibrium.

Mr. Murray noticed this also; and, remarking that my ancestor's ghost must have jumped down from its high perch to walk up and down its old ways, adjusted the picture with the long fire-poker. I could not tell him my fears—that a worse than ghost was at that moment concealed beneath the spot where we were standing, and that he was my kinsman. With what feelings of unspeakable dread I listened for a repetition of that sound, while with an overwhelming sense of human helplessness I felt the cords of a relentless fate tighten about my throat,—the long-foreboded calamity spread its sable wings over. Drawing the minister into the sitting-room, I made him sit beside me, while, feeling that my burden might rest easier on me did I share it, I confessed to him my knowledge of the identity of the Sang Digger and his daughter. Also, not daring to look into his face, I told of the relation I had once sustained to Warren Montague.

Imagine my surprise, my supreme relief, when he told me that he had long known this from the lips of Warren himself, who, with the chivalric spirit of the patrician gentleman, had exonerated

me from all blame, begging only that John Lovelace be kept in ignorance of it.

"Why?" I asked, thickly.

"John Lovelace is my best friend. We were classmates at college and the University. I have never known a man of so fascinating a personality and withal so lofty a character and so high ideals of what men and women should be in life, as he has. His ideas of women are not just the same as mine: while they are to me purer and gentler beings than men, I still see them to be creatures of frailty, capable of yielding to certain temptations, and therein more lovable. I have not blamed you for the indirect part you played in that tragedy—it was the inevitable outcome of the frivolous life in which you moved that a woman of your charm should be tempted to indulge in some unthinking coquetry, such as may have goaded that foolish soul to that rash act. I have watched you well, and your actions to me have proved such frivolity contrary to your nature. I have seen in you instead a noble unrest and a striving to live above that hollow past—Oh, Patsy, I would help you!"

My tears of gratitude fell upon the hand I had taken in mine:

"'T is you who have shown me the better way!" I answered him. "You have been the best friend of my life—you and Elisabeth," I added softly as I thought of her sacrifice of love, whereby she re-

signed to me that which had perhaps been hers had she spoken the truth against me.

"She is an angel," said Mr. Murray quietly.

"But why have you not—oh, why has not somebody told—him?" I cried, burying my face in my hands. "He will find it out—I must tell him, then—then—!"

"Perhaps it had been better," he answered me, his voice strangely choked. "But he was my friend, and I threw the tempter from me; but I was tried, God only knows how much—and I did—not—know— How long have—you—loved him?"

"Always, I think."

Then I told him of the spies, and of how I feared, since Elisabeth had not returned, that something had gone amiss. At once he rose to go to the help of his friend—his friend, his love for whom he suffered not even the thought of this last great bitterness of unrequited love to cloud. To his astonishment—and to my own, it must be confessed—I rose to accompany him; and though he protested vigorously, he was now to learn, if never before, how solid a wall of resistance is woman's obstinacy.

"I have a reason—a good one," I replied gazing calmly into his troubled eyes, but seeing nothing; for beneath my feet I trampled those eternal forces of life—joy and hope and the bliss

of earthly affection. "Let us bring him here to the Nunnery until the present danger be past." Then, as he seemed to hesitate, I continued: "After the spies are dispatched, he will give himself up—I will see to it,—come!"

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH ARE MANY WATERS

No time was to be lost, for it was now five o'clock. Snatching a bit of dinner lest suspicion be aroused, and leaving orders that no one wait up for us, Mr. Murray and I set out on our uncertain mission.

Gaining the river, we looked carefully about. No one was in sight. The clouds hung low over the earth; the rain fell in an ever-increasing drizzle; and we heard how the wind seemed sobbing a dirge through the pine tops up the black gorge; then, as a child at play, rattled the naked limbs, and went howling down the river corridor. Owing to the gradual thaw and the recent rains, torrents of seething yellow-red water, mingled with snow masses, ice and promiscuous débris, came raging down the track, that, until now, had retained at this point its cover of ice. From every tributary ravine or brook-bed poured rivers of water to augment the awful current. The ice on which Elisabeth had crossed during the morning, was groaning and swaying under pressure of the flood that submerged it; and we observed how, out to midstream, a narrow, boiling strip of water had cut a track through the ice barrier, and, hugging

all obstacles to its breast, dashed on in terrific haste in pursuit of further mischief.

I shuddered—what if Elisabeth had attempted to cross on the ice in the uncertain twilight, and had plunged into that fearful current! Finding that to cross at this place was now fraught with serious risk, we went a short distance below to where the county bridge spliced the shores of the river; and though there was great danger of encounter, we achieved our crossing unnoticed, and made our way back over a footpath that hugged the opposite bank. The river was yet within its confines, but it promised irrepressible action in the near future; and should it flood its banks here, all hope of return would be cut off, for above this perilous footpath the cliffs rose perpendicular. So there was need of haste were we to find the objects of our quest and return with them to the Nunnery.

The climb over the slippery and ofttimes slanting rocks—a misstep on which would have landed me into eternity by way of that awful current—so exhausted me, that, reaching the mouth of Hell Gate only to find the path up the gorge a track of boiling water, I sank down upon a log under a thick-set spruce to rest and muster courage to continue the journey.

It is often to such specks of circumstance that the gigantic dramas of life owe the germs of their existence. We were no sooner seated than we

heard footsteps a short way above us; a person in heavy boots was laboriously slushing down the gorge. Soon two distinct treads could be distinguished, and a low mumble of voices. Our suspicions aroused, we crouched behind the low-hanging boughs of the spruce to spy upon them.

On they came; and their careless walk and conversation proved them confident that no listening ears would be abroad on such a night. We dared not peep from our green window to see them, but their speech betrayed them to be men apart from the little world of Mooretown.

"This gorge is well named, 'pon my word, partner! If this place be not hell-favored, and a good foretaste of that which awaits him and his kind, then I 'm a dub!" said one in careless tones as they stopped near us regarding the river.

"An ugly stream that, and promises greater interest soon. If our plan carries to-night—and carry it must for I am sick of this game, in spite of the boodle—there is no time for bush-beating," replied his companion. "See yonder animal—a cow, 'pon my honor!—careering down, leg over, there to midstream? Something 's doing above, friend! Think you we can make it back to the cave by eight, sharp?"

"Gad, we can! and the fox in chains and off to the station ere trouble brews in this quarter. Luck has come our way with this storm, 'pon my word

it has. The badgers will hardly look for callers this night, think you?"

"I heard a woman's voice in that hole—I don't like the mixing of sweetmeats in this soup."

"One would think his soup were overflavored with such sweets already—Warren Montague should know now to let women alone, God knows!"

"'T is a hard lesson to learn, friend—a hard lesson!" chuckled the other as they moved down the path to the bridge.

We looked at each other in the heavy gloom, and the hand on my companion's arm trembled. In feverish impatience we waited until the sound of their voices was lost around the curving bank; then in one breath we gasped: "Eight o'clock, sharp!"

"It will be folly to remove him to the Nunnery," said the minister. "Already they know his hiding place; besides, to cross that bridge means almost certain detection. It's as well that the law have its way, and that he pay the penalty, whatever it be—it *must* be, hard as it will be to bear—think of John, and his days of wasted ability!"

"But he is ill—he cannot go as he is," I protested.

"Once he consents to give himself up, his sickness will leave him—it is purely mental; but to live on as he now lives is a thing impossible—the Furies devour him."

But did I consider the rights of law and justice? Ah, no! I saw a face in the hollow eyes of which lurked the fear of the helpless beast fleeing from a deadly foe; I saw the shrunken frame in which crouched a spirit, broken; I saw—oh God!—the frowning scaffold, up whose steps they stagger, drawn by the hand of unforgiving man, who come not down until they enter the presence of One whose law is Love, and with whom Justice is swallowed up of Mercy; I thought of his sister, so dear to me, and of his mother; and I thought, and most tenderly, of that other, and of his sacrifice, to accomplish which the call to fame and the worship of thousands had been cast aside: of all these I thought as we rushed up the rough way blinded by more than darkness, and I vowed to save him.

Our garments were drenched; the slimy leaves, wet mosses, and slippery rocks, gave us many a tumble on to sharp stones; the souging dripping boughs of the underbrush stung our faces; the wind howled above us; and sometimes the stricken limb of a tree fell crashing to the forest floor beside us; while up the gorge the black shadows of night crept out from their hiding places, and, to welcome our eager footsteps, threw their chilling arms about us.

Reaching the cave's entrance, we paused; but hearing no voices, stooped and entered. A narrow passage, through which one had to crawl, led

back to where a flare of light beckoned. And then a wonder unfolded itself: we entered a room some twenty-five feet in length and fifteen in width, with a ceiling so high that a tall man could not reach it. In this room was every evidence of a comfortable living; a cheerful fire leaped up from an excavation in the far end, the smoke escaping through an upward slanting fissure; the walls were of gray limestone, much creviced; and into these crevices were stuck pine torches to assist the fire in the necessary illumination. Arranged about the cave were a few pieces of furniture, barrels, and boxes for the storage of provisions and necessities. On a table, overspread with a cloth of green denim, lay some heavy law-books, a few others well but inconspicuously dressed as the refined should be, and a well-worn Bible; two or three small prints of celebrated paintings adorned the walls, and a photograph of Warren's mother hung over the table.

There were two beds of hemlock boughs spread over with heavy blankets; and on one of these, dressed in his own clothes, lay Warren, sleeping restlessly. Elisabeth sat beside him holding a thin hand in hers. Mr. Lovelace sat at the table writing.

At the sight of us Elisabeth sprang to her feet with a smothered cry; while Mr. Lovelace, coming forward quickly, took both my hands in his, and said, looking at the minister:

"What does this mean, that you permit her to come at this hour—in this tempest?"

But I broke from him, and rushing to Elisabeth, threw my arms about her, without daring to look toward the bed.

"You have given me such a fright, dear! I could not wait, not even until he should come to search for you—I thought—I feared—"

"I could not leave him," she answered, looking at me, her eyes hollow with suffering. "He has been raving; some premonition of ill—I know not why—has haunted him to-day; and when I have thought to leave him he has clung to me until I couldn't—Oh Patsy! would it not be a mercy if death claimed him before—"

Then I looked at Mr. Murray beseechingly; and he told them of the gossip concerning the spies; of how we, fearing for them, had formed a plan to remove Warren to the Nunnery until danger should be past; and of how, hurrying hither to accomplish this, we had learned of their designs to thwart which there was now need of wit and haste.

Then I proposed a scheme which had been formulated on my way up the gorge, and was this: that Warren be taken to the shanty on the mountain, and left in charge of the three, while I, in the dress of the dumb girl, remain to meet the spies and frustrate their plans, for they would scarcely fail to recognize my sex.

"Never!" exclaimed John Lovelace brusquely. "If you remain then I remain with you."

"Perhaps they will know you," I argued. "Perhaps, having learned of your connection with the family and your disappearance at the same time, they will search for you in the person of the old Sang Digger; 't will be unsafe."

"We shall see," he replied. "In the meantime, let 's to the task, for it seems all there is left to do, as they doubtless guard the river path. The result is uncertain, yet one likes not to be taken as a rat in a trap. 'T were wiser, indeed, to surrender ourselves voluntarily, which we will do in good time,—but not here, to give them the laugh and a fat sum for our capture."

The two men, with what articles they deemed necessary to the occupation of the shanty, set out at once, leaving Elisabeth and me in charge of Warren and the cave. I set about arranging a suitable toilet. Removing and concealing my hat, rain coat and tailored suit, I loosened my hair, and, donning a waist and skirt that hung on the wall, found there was nothing else to be desired, for my small frame, lost in their amplitude, presented the pathetic aspect of a slum child sporting the donations of charity.

"Patsy," called Elisabeth from her brother's side, "have you looked at him? Would you recognize that wreck to be our handsome Warren?"

Together we stood arm in arm regarding him, our tears falling upon his couch.

"God knows, Elisabeth," I sobbed; "I gave him no just cause to doubt me! Those accusations have been cruel, unjust!"

"Do I not know this, Patsy? Time upon time I warned him to beware of his groundless jealousies!"

"And if to defend him, I say that I was to blame—that I goaded him to desperation by my faithlessness—that I knew of the other's design to kill him—if I *say* these things, will you still believe in me, and some day, in the far future, will—you—tell—John—the—truth?"

She held me close in her arms and kissed me tenderly.

"I will never permit that, Patsy—not while I live."

Suddenly, as if under the influence of my presence, Warren opened his eyes, and, seeing me bending over him, sat up and stared wildly into my face.

"Warren," I whispered in an agony of pity, as I looked into his changed face—a face I had once thought so handsome—"do you know me, Warren?"

He grasped my hand, and pressed his hot lips to its cool surface:

"Know you! My God, Patsy—know you!" he almost shrieked.

I drew back, shuddering, from his touch, a sudden sickening aversion overwhelming me. Had I once looked into those eyes with approval? Had those hands—those blood-stained hands—caressed me—those lips breathed love to my listening ear? And was it for love of me that he, in his weakness, had fallen and was now reduced to this—this miserable creature in whom was no longer strength for resistance, will to overcome, nor courage to meet a just punishment? Could I now, looking at him, doubt that man must reap the fruit of his sowing? And was I—was I to escape? Oh, ye Furies of vengeance, no.

Feeling my repugnance as I shrank from him, he sprang from the bed; and escaping to a far corner by the fireside, sank down upon his knees, beating his breast, tearing his hair, raving:

“An outcast—a vagabond—a viper,—she shrinks from me! Is there then blood on my fingers! Is its mark on my forehead! Oh, ten thousand demons of Hell, could I but escape you! Is there no God in Heaven—no God of mercy—no refuge for me! Oh, justice of Earth! you stretch out to me the gaunt arms of the gallows—you clasp me, beckoning from those black cavern recesses—you call in the creaking of those trees on yonder mountain! Oh God, is there no mercy no rest, and sweet forgetfulness!”

His frenzy spent, his strength gone, he sank

down until he lay prone upon the stone floor of the cavern.

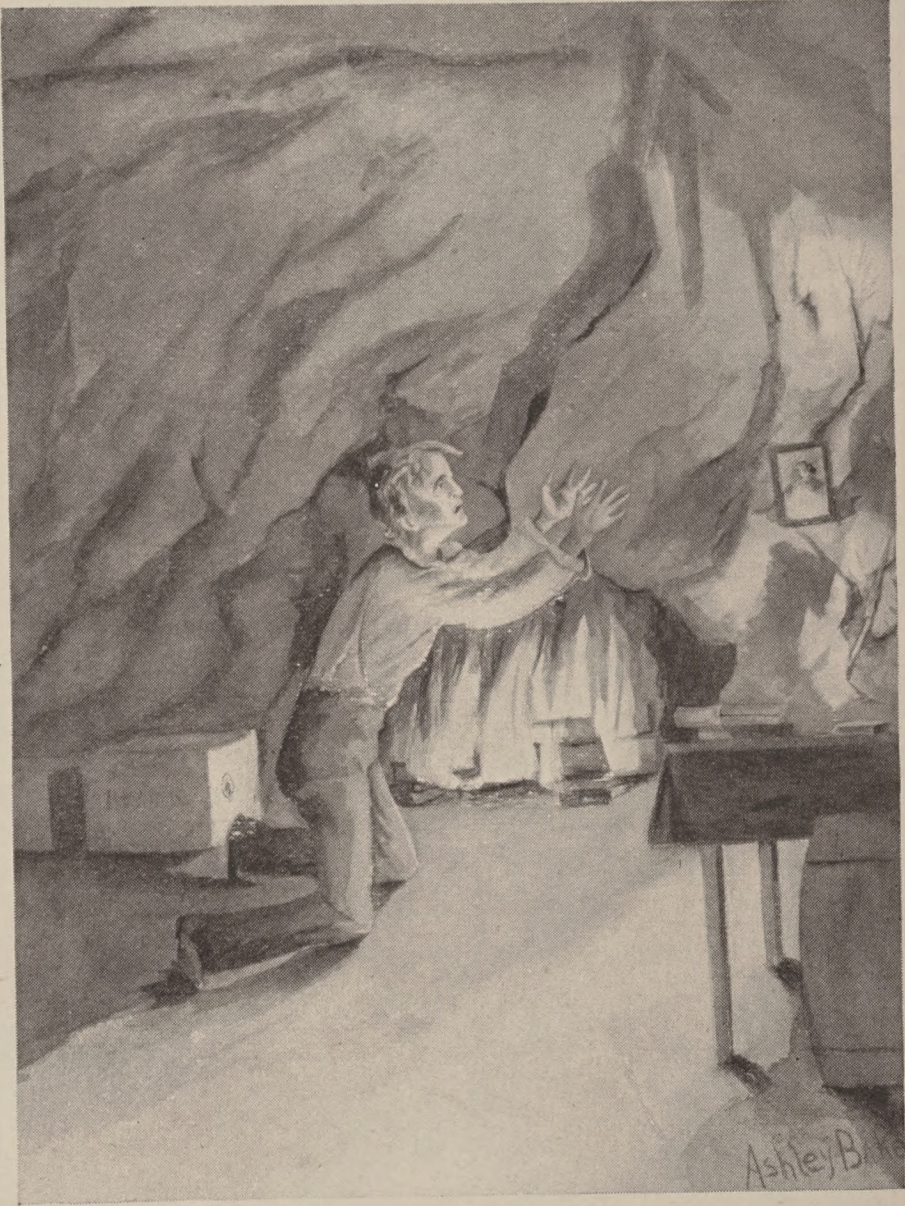
Elisabeth threw herself down upon the couch of juniper, torn with anguish. I could stand it no longer. I rose to my feet, tottering, and went over to him. I lifted the head with its mass of glossy curls and held it in my arms as I would have done a sick child. I smoothed back his hair and called upon him to listen to me:

"Warren, have courage: our God is not a God of wrath, but of long-suffering and infinite mercy. It is not His will that you suffer thus, expiating daily in ten fold bitterness that sin for which you have suffered enough. He has sent me to you to-night to help you—to save you from yourself—will you listen to me?"

He looked up eagerly, a pitiful inquiry in his eyes.

"Do you remember that you saved my life? I have not forgotten it nor has a higher tribunal of justice failed to reckon it in your favor. Sure as there is a God of Justice, so sure will your just deserts be meted you, and this is what I would urge:

"You escape not by remaining here, dying this daily death of remorse. You must learn the lesson of submission to the penalty of a broken law—a law made by the Great Law-giver, for the breaking of which the inevitable penalty must be endured by man. There is no way out of it, but,



“ ‘ Is there blood on my fingers ! ’ ”

oh, Warren! let me beseech you, learn this lesson here—in this life! Submit to that here which must else be borne yonder in that place of hopelessness! It will not be so hard as you fear. Gain once the victory over yourself, and strength will be given you to return and free yourself and those about you from this torture. Your voluntary surrender will not be without its reward: the tide of public feeling will turn in your favor, and I—I will go with you and help you; I will testify for you, for there is much that I can and will say—of how he threatened you; of the pistol he carried; neither will I spare myself, Warren; I will tell them all, and more,—of how I led you both on to love me—of how I goaded you—of how—”

“Oh, no, no, Patsy!” cried Elisabeth, springing to her feet and running to me. “It is all false—a horrible injustice! Were Warren himself, he would not listen. Think of the disgrace; of how willingly the world shifts such burdens on women’s frail shoulders! You have had enough—take not more than your share!”

“He *must* go back, Elisabeth; and who is to help him if not you and I! I fear it is already too late, for he can no longer help himself. He has his mother and you—who is there to care what becomes of me or if—my—name—is—”

“Oh, Patsy!” she entreated, clasping my waist,

"am I nothing to you? There will be another way—think—of—John!"

Then an arrow pierced me: "John! what am I—to—him!"

"You are everything to him, Patsy—he worships you."

"Elisabeth," said I, and my own voice frightened me; "Elisabeth, do you envy me now?"

She laid her soft hands upon my lips:

"Love never dies, dear; and he loves—you." She turned from me, and, going slowly back to the couch, fell beside it upon her knees. I did not follow her.

Warren had risen to his feet as we talked thus together, and was pacing to and fro before the fire. As I approached him he stopped before me and said, with something of hope in his voice:

"Your words have set me thinking, Patsy, and your promised presence strengthens me. My mind is resolved—I will go back. I see it now; there is no way of escape. I have long desired, for John's sake, as well as for my own, to give myself over to the proper authorities. But I have had no courage. Now can I go, for with your sympathy, your help, the way seems smooth—Oh, Patsy!" He would have taken my hand, but I drew back quickly, and hastened to offer in words the only consolation to be given.

"This decision is most worthy of you and your old self, Warren. It cannot be death that awaits

you there—here it can be nothing else, and the worst of deaths. It will be a few years' imprisonment, perhaps, then freedom of body and conscience, and many years in which to atone for these lost months. My plans are already well laid, and are these: My school closes in two weeks; in the meantime you will come to the Nunnery (my house), and there, by the aid of what comfort and cheer we are able to afford you, strength will be gained for the ordeal that awaits you; after this we will go together—you, Elisabeth, and I—and have done with it. Is the arrangement not a good one?"

"There is but one thing that troubles me," said Warren. "There lurks in me to-night a fear of spies. To be dragged from my hiding place as a wild beast from its lair; to be borne in chains and by the strong arm of the law back to those who thirst for my blood and who will gloat over me, paying joyfully the large bounty set on my head; to be held up to my old comrades as a warning, and my capture extolled as an example of the sure triumph of justice,—the thought of all this maddens me! Never will I be dragged back in chains!"

Then, because I must do it, I told him of the spies, and of our plans to thwart them. And I was made to wonder at the coolness he manifested, who, a few moments before, had cringed in groveling fear. In his eyes shone the light of hope and

purpose; new strength came into his frail body; and he displayed eager interest in the plans for his safety, moving here and there, collecting such articles as he valued and destroying those that might betray him. Books were examined, and fly-leaves, bearing his name, were burned. His mother's photograph he placed in the inside pocket of his coat, together with a packet of old letters he took from a crevice far back in a dark corner—letters that I recognized.

By seven o'clock the men returned; and though they suffered a shock on seeing the change in Warren, they wisely asked no questions, and made immediate preparations to depart with him and Elisabeth to the shanty.

When their footsteps had died away, and I realized that I was alone, I experienced a reaction of terror. A slight sound, made perhaps by a mouse, came to me from an unexplored recess; and the sound, assuming proportions equal to no less than the tread of the spies themselves, served to agitate me almost beyond control. With a smothered cry I fled to the entrance; and there, as I stooped to escape through the opening, my ear caught the sound of footsteps approaching the cave from the mountain. Was all to be lost through my cowardice? Was there any constancy of purpose in me, and the law governing my life—was it the law of inclination? With a cry for strength, I turned from that last hope of escape;

and, going over to the fire, my mind clear, my head cool to face whatever might come, I waited.

Somebody entered. Arming myself by a firm tension of the muscles, I turned and faced—Gogaphy. He came to me and took my hands in his. Then, seeing the terror in my eyes, he took me close in his arms, brushed back the hair from my face, and kissed my forehead, my eyes, and my lips tenderly. Then came to me the intoxication that a helpless woman feels in a strong presence. It acted as a stimulant: the blood bounded again over me, and an influence to forgetfulness came, excluding all realties, while I felt but one all-pervading sensation—a sense of security and the tumultuous joy of his presence. From out his eyes a light leaped to mine and thrilled me. And yet, again I tried, ere it be too late, and while clinging to him, to tell him all, but he would not listen; kissing the words from my lips he called me dear and foolish names, saying that I was brave, and that he was unworthy of me. As for me, losing myself for the moment, I drifted, as borne on the bosom of some stream of delight, while visions of far-off, love-lit shores melted into the horizon of oblivion.

Some moments passed thus in which the serious business of the hour was forgotten. Then came through my senses the consciousness of why I was there. I sprang from my lover in horror.

"Oh, Gogaphy, have you forgotten? Time passes and you are here, and undisguised!"

As I spoke the sound of voices at the entrance greeted us. Pressing a kiss on my lips, Mr. Lovelace turned from me, adjusted his mask quickly, and went unarmed to meet the intruders. With a pounding heart I stood near a chair by the fire and struck an inquisitive pose, while the two men, not waiting an invitation, pressed through the entrance, and stood glaring about on the novel scene before them.

"A strange place and a stranger hour, friends, to seek shelter on this lonely mountain—have you missed your way?" asked the old Sang Digger with solicitude.

The younger man moved about the cave in an assertive manner, that, had we not already known their errand, would have aroused our gravest suspicions. The elder man took it on himself to answer my companion and went straight to business:

"A strange place and hour, indeed, sir; but with such hours and such unchristian holes we are not unfamiliar. We have come in the performance of a painful duty—the apprehension of Warren Montague, who is wanted to answer for the murder of George Courtland in the city of ———, during the first week of December, 190—. We have evidence that he has remained in hiding here during most of this time; and,

trusting that the application of force will be unnecessary, we request his immediate surrender."

"Perhaps your enthusiasm has misled you, gentlemen," said John Lovelace quietly. "I give you leave to search my poor dwelling, however, and should you find him whom you seek, have your will with him."

"I hear you have a daughter—a dumb girl," answered the man, casting an insinuating glance in my direction. "Is yonder she, standing in the shadows?"

I came timidly forward that they might see me, and triumphed inwardly as I thought of the disappointment in store for them when they found before them such a feminine bit of humanity. No sooner did my eyes meet those of the older man, however, than consternation seized *me*, and not him, who stood gazing coolly into my white face. Our deception, so poorly attempted, was now reduced to an empty farce; for I knew the man, and knew him to be the keenest detective of our city. Most unfortunate of all, however, I was no stranger to him, for our homes had been but a block apart, and besides, I had once employed his aid in the recovery of stolen valuables.

"That is calico, by gum!" exclaimed the assistant.

But the other turned to John Lovelace and said:

"Mr. Lovelace, it is useless that you and I

bandy words. I know of you, and why you have wasted these months of a prosperous life in shielding a criminal. Your action in the matter has been suspected by many, and lauded. I, for one, see little use in delaying a sure justice; and for your sakes I regret that his surrender has not been a voluntary one, though I now comprehend that this exile has not been without its compensations." He glanced at me suggestively, but I stood strangely calm, now that the end was at hand.

"Your insinuations may be dispensed with, sir, since they concern not your errand," replied my companion testily.

"The presence of this lady happens to concern our business most vitally, Mr. Lovelace. Perhaps since Miss Grigsby has not forgotten her former interest in the young man whom we seek, her present interest includes at least a knowledge of his hiding place."

"What mean you, man!" cried John Lovelace, catching the speaker's arm in a grip that was furious.

"Your education in the particulars of that affair has been sadly neglected, I fear sir, if you are ignorant that it resulted from a quarrel concerning a certain young woman of whose beauty and charm you are perhaps cognizant also. If you follow my advice, young man, you will be wary of the enchantress."

"I need no advice from you, sir," replied my

cousin with so small a manifestation of concern in his voice that I glanced for the first time at him. But seeing that in his eyes which frightened me, I turned to the detective, determined to end the affair at once.

"Mr. Sterrett, whether your accusations of my implication in this matter are as just as you would have believe, it is not time nor place to discuss. But that my interest in Warren Montague still lives, I will prove to you by the following confession:—It has been within the last few days only that I discovered in the dumb girl the person of my old friend; to-night for the first time I have spoken with him, and I find him both willing and eager to return and give himself up. He is, however, at present too weak to travel, and I beg this indulgence of you: permit him to cross the river to my home, there to remain—under your surveillance if you deem best—until he regain strength, and until I am prepared to accompany him. I have promised him this in order that he have courage to go; besides, I have important testimony to give in his favor. Promise me this, and I will take you to him."

But Gogaphy came to me; and taking my hand fiercely in his, looked into my face, in his eyes a wild glitter.

"Patsy!" he cried in the voice of a drowning man, "Patsy, what was Warren to you?—tell me!"

"He was my fiancé, John," I replied with that strength that the frailest women betray in those moments of torture that come their portion in life. "In three months I would have married him. I go now to be with him—and save—him."

"Why did you not tell me this sooner?"

I gave him no answer.

"I have heard," he began, speaking slowly, and in a voice I knew not, "I have heard of these women, who please to style themselves society belles, and who seem the perfection of outward loveliness; and yet who perpetrate beneath the pennant of coquetry acts of deliberate cruelty and treachery, deadening their consciences,—if indeed they have any; making and breaking lightly the most sacred ties of earth—they own no law save their vanity. Such a woman I knew caused this wreck, but that this woman was my—my—cousin—!" his voice choked.

Involuntarily I turned toward him, my hands clenched lest they reach out to him in supplication, while the accumulated debts of a frivolous life paid themselves in a coin of leaden bitterness. And though I seemed to totter on the brink of that chasm that held for me the blackness of death, and a bitter inward cry rent my heart, my voice answered, full of indifference:

"You are wise, John. Of that class of women to which you so respectfully refer your criticisms are wonders of infallibility. This condition of

society is more to be lamented since the men, with whom these frivolous beings associate, are so eminently their superiors. But the tragedy lies in the fact that these men—rational and elective beings as they are—seem to find satisfaction, even supreme delight, in the society of these despicable creatures. That it has been your misfortune to associate of late with one of these is to be regretted. It is to be hoped, however, that no serious injury has been sustained thus far; and do not forget to be thankful that you have been thus mercifully preserved ere it was too late.”

He sank heavily into a chair by the table and buried his face on his arm. But I had caught the look of misery in his eyes; then, my heart broken, I went over to the men, who had withdrawn to the cave's entrance for consultation.

“If you will now kindly light my path, sirs, I will guide you to the end of your search,” I said quietly, passing out before them into the night and the tempest.

CHAPTER XXII

VISITING THE INIQUITY

And now, when I have come thus far in my story, though much remains to be told, my memory seems to play me false, refusing by some merciful trick to furnish more than a meagre outline of the events that followed fast upon that hour in which I turned my face from the cavern's mouth in the darkness and tempest of the night, within me and around me.

I remember with what surprising display of self-control Warren stood before us that night on which we came upon him there in that shanty in the midst of his new-born hope; and how, while I trembled so that I could scarcely tell him, and Elisabeth paled with anguish, he resigned himself without a quiver in his voice or a wavering of purpose, saying that, since a divine strength had been granted him, he purposed to go and that quickly.

I remember how the men urged that we remain in the cave over night; and how I protested, giving as a reason that much distress would be caused by my absence,—the while vowing to cross alone and at my life's risk rather than see him again in whose eyes I had read that which had stabbed me.

And this much, too, I remember: ere we began our descent to the river its menacing boom came to us, reverberating like the roar of distant battle through the night that shrouded us. Then, straining our eyes, through the gloom we saw the flood—a seething expanse of foam defined against the glossy pall of night. The trees that were wont to mark the river channel now stood far out, breasting the current like great animals, dumb yet resistant. Shapeless masses wedged past as in terrified haste. To have tried to cross by boat that turbulent area would have been suicide,—death was rushing by in one all-reaching embrace.

Somehow we reached the bridge—all of us save Mr. Lovelace, who desired to remain alone on the mountain; and in order to reach it Elisabeth and myself were at times carried through water ankle-deep that backed, lapping and slashing, over the cliff path. Somehow we reached the middle of the bridge, over which the water rushed a few inches deep; while, hissing and gurgling in drunken revel, it whirled against the piers beneath like an infuriated giant bent on an errand of devastation. The opposite shore was lost to view; but the twinkling of lanterns in and out through the water-covered floor of the forest announced that many boats were abroad, keeping well to the back waters. We heard also shouts from the shore, but, knowing not a word of what they said, nor that they, seeing our little light, strove to warn us

of danger, we plunged on, hoping only to reach the shore ere the bridge should be wholly under flood.

Then it all came as a flash of light and a thunderbolt from a clear sky. As we groped along by clinging to the railing lest a hole in the submerged floor betray us to death, there loomed upon us from out the darkness a towering mass of *débris*—logs, rails, roofs and timbers of buildings, that, locked in close embrace, were drawn by the demon of flood to augment its forces of devastation. Down it came upon us—that invincible hulk,—and, ere we could so much as breathe a prayer for forgiveness and pity, smote square upon that portion of the bridge upon which we clung. I remember the tremor of anguish with which the doomed structure gave its breast to the smiter; and I remember, after seeing how Warren put his arm tenderly about his sister, that I turned and looked into Mr. Murray's calm face, myself not one whit afraid. He put his arm about my waist, saying quietly, "shall we meet it together, Patsy?" And then the flood passed over us, bringing first a spasm of fear, a moment of wild struggle for the life that seems so dear in the relinquishing, and then—blessed oblivion.

When my ears opened to the consciousness of sound, it was not to the lash and roar of angry waters. I lay for a moment without the least sense

of suffering and with no vexatious memory to distress me. My chief concern was as to where I had wakened. Had I entered that unknown WHERE that receives us there beyond our last great mortal change? Yes, surely, for there at the end of my earthly life I had embarked with the grim ferryman upon that Stygian flood! I tried to put my right hand to my head: it was bound tight to my side. Then with the other, I found my forehead: it was bandaged heavily. In fear I opened my eyes. I lay on a white bed in a room where all was blue and white and gold—all save the person who bent over me striving to prevent the movement of my left arm. She was not of that form and color usually ascribed to seraphic ministrants; she was very black and also very fat.

“Dyar, dyar, honey chile—don’ you pester yo’self; yo’ ole mammy gwine git you some nourishment—youse jes’ ’bliged ter hab it, don’ keer what dat doctor says!”

So after all, it was dear old Aunt Judy with her never-failing food supply; and I was in my own bed in my own room at the Nunnery! With that glimmer of returning consciousness came a rush of ill-defined memories. I started up quickly calling for Elisabeth.

“Dyar, honey! dyar lam’!” coaxed the old woman, forcing me gently back. “Don’ you pester yo’self, chile! Miss Lizzie ’s all right; she ’s in dis house—she ’s sleepin’.” She turned away

quickly as she said this, and going over to the window, bent over a box of violets that filled the room with fragrance.

"Who else is here, Auntie?" I asked, feeling that Elisabeth was not the only one of whom I must think, but unable to remember anyone else.

"Dey 's all hyar, chile; now you jes' res' yo'self whiles I goes an' fetches de vittals."

I closed my eyes and she left the room softly. Then I sat up, and, putting my head in the hand that was free, strove to recall the events of the past night—or days and nights, I knew not which. Creeping out of bed, I found that though my knees were unstable I was able to walk. I went across to Cousin Peggy's room; no one was there. Then to Elisabeth's room; it also was empty. After resting a moment I descended the stairs; and, drawn by some impulse, entered the library.

As I entered the room there was a movement over in the corner by the fireplace—some person or thing seemed to disappear down through the old settle. But I thought nothing of it, for two other objects riveted my attention: on four chairs before the unwarmed fireplace rested two caskets banked high with flowers. Then I knew; brother and sister had gone together to stand before the Tribunal Bar where justice is rendered according to man's just deserts—he, brave in his new-found strength, and trusting to divine forgiveness; she, in the bloom of her youth and

beauty, to that reward which is vouchsafed the pure in heart.

I fell upon my knees by her side. "Oh, Elisabeth," I cried; "best, truest friend! I it was who was to go with him to plead for and to suffer with him—I, who am not guiltless! Why am I left, and alone—Oh, why!"

A slight noise from above, coming it seemed from the portrait of my grandfather, caused me to look up. I saw the great frame move slowly, tremble, lurch heavily to the left, and ere I could escape, fall crashing upon me. I knew it struck my head, for an agony shot through it, a sense of growing numbness and fatigue overwhelmed me, and again—darkness and oblivion.

The twelfth of May—my twenty-seventh birthday. For some days I had been awake, understanding what I saw and what was asked me of my physical needs, watching with interest all that passed about me—smiling sometimes; but my comprehension was in the present only, and automatically, performing what it did because of long-enforced habit. For me there was no terrifying memory, no hopes or fears for the future—the past had vanished.

On this day I had crept down into the Jungle, where, under a canopy of flowering dogwood, I threw myself upon the breast of the pregnant

earth, and pressed my cheek lovingly to that cool, quiet bed. It was good to feel the touch of the Universal Mother—to rest upon her breast who holds in her large bosom the buried treasures of the race. Her heart was throbbing with the renewed joys of maternity—was I to wake again to spring, whom the winter of oblivion now enshrouded?

A subtle sweet influence was abroad,—the breath of spring. It was wafted in odors from myriad bursting buds, from the fragrance of mint and pennyroyal and the wild cherry; it gleamed in a thousand eyes of swallow-wort, violet, anemones, and hepatica; it tossed the jaunty heads of the dandelions, and tinkled among the nodding ferns and sedges; it poured vocal from the throats of the feather-vested choristers in the emerald lofts above; it flashed in heat and light and color over all the earth: Spring—the trumpet call of Nature bidding an innumerable army come forth of those not dead but sleeping. For there is no death, neither in the organic world nor yet in the spiritual!

On this morning in May, as these flood-tides of life stirred about me, they awakened in me nothing more than a feeling of supreme content that I could lie thus in peace and gaze as a child with half-comprehending look upon the beauties of young nature about me. A pair of catbirds, busy about their spring house-repairs interested me,

and I stood up to watch them. Suddenly, in the midst of their labors they uttered cries of alarm and flew anxiously about. Hearing footsteps hastening my way, turned expecting to see the physician who had watched me solicitously during these days when my mind slumbered. Then my memory, fumbling as a blind man for the knob of a fast-closed door, began its struggle for light. I knew the man who came toward me and threw himself on his knees before me, kissing my hands, then crying hoarsely through dry lips as he looked into my changed face: "Oh, Patsy, my life—forgive, oh, forgive me!"

Never had I seen—that I remembered—such a look of pain in a face, and it reacted on me as an awakening terror of memory,—of a night—when was it—what had he been to me? Both hands went to my head, a chill crept over me, and, as the criminal wakes to the dawn that is his last, my mind crept out from the shadows of slumber into a day of death—I remembered.

I shrank from him, while, as a mist clouded my eyes, I tottered and grasped the dogwood. Then he took me in his arms as he would have done a little child coming out of a troubled sleep and needing the mother comfort; and there, with my head on his shoulder, I wept tears that carried away with them the agony which had so often risen in my throat to choke me. Was it the quiet strength of his presence that hushed the storm

within me, or the magic of the fond and foolish words he murmured to soothe? With the ebbing of those tears it was to me as if the sun, long shrouded, burst forth to shine again in splendor upon my earthly pathway. My heart filled and overflowed with a peace past naming; I cared not to question nor to doubt; the past with its horrors trailed its black shape off into the shadows—there were no fears for the future, for the path led upward where Eternal Heights Beckoned.

“Oh, Gogaphy!” I whispered, holding his face between my hands and kissing the white forehead, for I read in his face the light of a deathless love, “I thought you would hate me when you knew—I thought you hated me—on that—night; but, oh! I have—learned—so much—since then—I will be—better—I—”

But he put his hand over my mouth: “Don’t—don’t!” he pleaded; “I am the one who have learned my lesson well; I am the craven—you blameless! But were it ten thousand times the reverse, this, too, have I learned in these days and nights of agony—that love is Immortal!”

FINALE

He told me afterwards how it all happened—how on that night, having recovered from the shock to his jealous pride, and torn with contrition, he had rushed out to find me, and gained the river after the waves had gone over us. Neither did he spare to tell of how happy he thought me to be in that hour of death rather than suffering in life the agony of that hour to him. Then of how, rushing wildly down the river, at unheeded risk, he came upon Mr. Murray and me—the minister, his arm about me, clinging to the branches of a tree and crying for help—myself, my arm broken, my head bleeding from some sharp contact,—insensible. The bodies of the other four were found next morning far down the track of the flood, and were brought to the Nunnery.

Concerning the second and more serious catastrophe, it was as I had feared. The top of the settle—held secure underneath by heavy iron bolts—was the trap-door into the underground dungeon. This door opened downward; and so firmly was it held in place by bars of iron that when fastened it could not be budged up nor down so much as a hairbreadth. By an ingenious arrangement heavy wire cables, attached to these

bolts, extended inside the wall to the large rusty nail that held suspended the portrait over the mantel. By drawing the nail, the united ends of these wires could be grasped; and by pulling the wires the heavy iron bolts be made to slip in their sockets. Thus lay disclosed the secret of the entrance to this abode of ill. The drawing of the bolts underneath by the old man who no doubt desired to convey me, as he had done my grandfather, into the dungeon, had rendered the nail lax and had precipitated the ponderous frame to the floor, striking me on the temple, where now is an ugly scar.

Upon careful examination another nail was found on the floor; and its hole discovered close to the one that had terminated the wires from the trap-door. This nail had served at other times to sustain the weight of the frame; but now—an appointed agent to accomplish my further humiliation, or else to save me from that worse fate—had failed of its support.

On hearing the crash, my lover, who was in the room across preparing the bodies of the two detectives for their return home, rushed into the library, to find me crushed beneath the portrait, and his grandfather laughing in demoniacal exultation over me. He was bound and lowered through the trap-door until means could be found to convey him to the madhouse, from which he had just escaped. Seeking him later in the day, how-

ever, and receiving no response to calls, Mr. Lovelace descended the ladder which led down from the settle. And there, lying prone upon a heap of earth that partly revealed a grim skeleton, he was found dead, doubtless as a result of his maniacal frenzy.

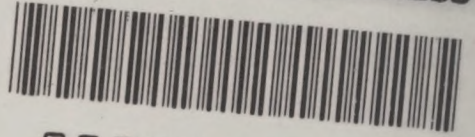
Thus the dungeon, built with the house, as a hiding place during the stormy days that preceded the war with England, had at last offered up its dead. The skeleton—upon which the maniac, by some strange dispensation of vengeance, had fallen in his last struggle,—with its fingers clenched, its hands and mouth bound by a rotten cloth, was the skeleton of my grandfather. Close by lay the body of Topsy.

On that day two graves were added to the little colony yonder in the orchard, where now there rests an unbroken line of a noble house. Yonder, too, some day—may it now be far distant—I shall be laid to rest in that cool quiet bed of Earth; while there, above and beyond me, the Eternal Hills shall stand, counting the tread of the centuries that pass over me, and beckoning my children to follow whither I have gone—upward.

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